

PART 1



Natives and Locals

THE SHEEPEATER MYTH OF NORTHWESTERN WYOMING

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Abstract

A TRIBE OF DIMINUTIVE AND TIMID SHEEPEATER INDIANS thought to be the only permanent residents of Yellowstone National Park are embedded in the local history and folklore of western Wyoming. Considerable mystery shrouds these people because historical and ethnographic information is scarce. Most problematic is that Sheepeaters vanished by the time Yellowstone Park was established in 1872. According to most accounts, the only traces of this vanished tribe are abandoned conical timber lodges, drive lines, and other wood structures encountered at high elevations. This paper is a critical review of the Sheepeater phenomenon in northwestern Wyoming. Through a detailed examination of nineteenth-century literature and Shoshone ethnography, this paper explores two ideas. First, the Sheepeaters as depicted in northwestern Wyoming folklore are predominantly a myth derived from the medieval wild man and an Indian stereotype passed down through colonial history, and second, a permanent band of Sheepeaters in Yellowstone National Park may never have existed.

Keywords: Sheepeaters, myths, Shoshone Indians, northwestern Wyoming, central Idaho.

Introduction

ACCORDING TO HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS AND LOCAL FOLKLORE, the only permanent residents of Yellowstone National Park were the Sheepeaters, a vanished tribe of mountain-dwelling pygmies. Because no Sheepeaters remain and little factual information exists about them, these Indians are shrouded in mystery (Hultkrantz 1970:246; Murphy and Murphy 1960:309). According to tradition, all that remains of their presence are primitive timber structures such as conical timber lodges (Figure 1), sheep traps, and other wood and brush structures located at high elevations in the Rocky Mountains (Frost 1941:17; Norris 1881:35; Tholson 1966; Hultkrantz 1970:257).

This paper is a critical review of the Sheepeater phenomenon in northwestern Wyoming. I propose that the image associated with the Sheepeaters is predominantly a myth passed down from the mid-nineteenth century and rooted in Victorian romanticism and colonial stereotypes of Native Americans. This paper uses the

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standard dictionary definition of *myth*, a fictional story developed to explain a basic truth (see Hultkrantz 1986:340–2 for a discussion of other meanings of myth). An *image* is a pictorial or mental representation of a people (Berkhofer 1978:xvii).

I propose that the Sheepeater myth is a non-Indian invention, the application of a borrowed Northern Shoshone word to an existing image replayed throughout colonial history. This myth developed during the 1870s, when Philetus Norris, second superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, popularized it to explain the abandoned Indian structures in Yellowstone Park.

This paper does not deny the existence of people who might have called themselves Sheepeaters or were called Sheepeaters by other Shoshone Indians. A myth generally has some factual basis. It does argue that the image applied to these mysterious people, the myth itself, is not factually based, that it is a Euro-American invention, and that the structures often attributed to Sheepeater occupation may be explained in other ways.

In support of this argument, I will explore two lines of evidence. First, the word *sheepeater* has a different meaning to the Northern Shoshone than that conveyed in the myth. Second, the Sheepeater image was in existence long before the word *sheepeater* was attached to it. Lastly, I will explore the evidence that links timber structures to the Sheepeaters in Yellowstone National Park.

The Sheepeater Myth of Northwestern Wyoming

THE MYSTERIOUS SHEEPEATER has appeared frequently in historical and popular literature of northwestern Wyoming (Allen 1913; Chittenden 1940:6–7; Frost 1941; Norris 1880:11, 26; Norris 1881:35; Sheridan 1882:12; Tholson 1966; Thompson 1941; Topping 1983:6). Norris provides a classic description of these people in his 1881 report on Yellowstone Park:

The only real occupants of the Park were the pigmy tribe of three or four hundred timid and harmless Sheepeater Indians, who seem to have won this appellation on account of their use of the flesh and skin of the bighorn sheep for food and clothing, and their skill in hunting these animals amid the cliffs, crags, and canons of the



Figure 1. Soapy Dale Lodge, northwest Wyoming, typical of the conical timber lodges attributed to the Sheepeaters (Wyoming Bureau of Land Management photo).

snowy mountains....Whether these people are the remnant of some former race, as the legendary wild men of the mountains, or are descendants of refugees from the neighboring Bannock and Shoshone Indians, is not known, although their own traditions and the similarity of their languages and signals indicate a common origin, or at least, occasional intermingling. These Sheepeaters were very poor, nearly destitute of horses and firearms....On account of this lack of tools they constructed no permanent habitations, but as evinced by traces of smoke and fire-brands they dwelt in caves and nearly inaccessible niches in the cliffs, or in skin-covered lodges, or circular upright brush-heaps called wickeups....Other traces of this tribe are found in the rude, decaying, and often extensive pole or brush fences for drive-ways of the deer, bison, and other animals... (Norris 1881:35).

Topping adds another element to the image:

The cold and privations endured by the Sheepeaters have left their mark, for they are small of stature, and in brain diminutive, and compare very unfavorably with their relatives, the Shoshones (Topping 1883:6).

These descriptions combine to create a romanticized notion of a vanished tribe of pygmies who lived in the lofty recesses of the mountains in northwestern Wyoming, and especially Yellowstone National Park. Pervasive elements of the image are their lack of horses, impoverished state, small size, isolation, and timidity.

While most writers agree on the basic elements of the image, considerable disagreement exists over the relationship of the Sheepeaters to other Indian tribes. As noted above, Norris recognizes a similarity in language to the Shoshone and Bannock, but ponders whether the vanished Sheepeaters represented a separate "race." At about the same time, Sheridan suggests that the Sheepeaters were "a band of Snake or Shoshone Indians, probably renegades" who took refuge in the mountains to protect themselves from their own people and other marauding Indians (Sheridan 1882:12). Most later accounts describe them as renegades or outcasts of other tribes, usually Shoshone or Bannock tribes (Thompson 1941; Tholson 1966; Trenholm and Carley 1981:23). Haines (1977:22–24) describes them not as outcasts, but as people who could not compete against the gun-wielding and equestrian Indian societies of the eighteenth century. To Hultkrantz, a leading ethnographer of the Eastern Shoshone, they represent Shoshone "walkers," Shoshone who "retained the old way of living from the time before horses were introduced and who established a specialized mountain culture" (Hultkrantz n.d.:152; Hultkrantz 1970:247). The conflicting notions of who the Sheepeaters were adds to the mystery and is a clue that the phenomenon may be more myth than fact.

The Shoshone Word for Sheepeater

I PROPOSE THAT THE SHEEPEATER MYTH represents the attachment of a Northern Shoshone word to an enduring Euro-American stereotype of the Native American. A review of Shoshone ethnographic literature reveals that its meaning to the Northern

Shoshone is different from the meaning conveyed in the myth. The Indians in the myth are usually described as a discrete political unit, either a band, tribe, or race, characterized by a unique cultural-ecological adaptation.

In the pre-reservation era, the Shoshone occupied the central Great Basin from southern Nevada to central Idaho and western Wyoming (Figure 2). The Northern and Eastern Shoshone who are ethnically linked to the Sheepsteers occupied the northern Great Basin, middle Rockies, and eastern Plains along with a large group of Bannock speakers who recently migrated to eastern Idaho from Oregon (Murphy and Murphy 1960:315; Steward 1970a:200). While the two tribes coexisted together amiably, they spoke different languages of the Uto-Aztecian linguistic stock (Murphy and Murphy 1960:293; Steward 1970a:625).

Ethnographers refer to those Shoshone occupying the northern Great Basin as the Northern Shoshone, while the Wyoming Shoshone are often referred to as the Eastern Shoshone. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, the Northern and Eastern Shoshone were established on three reservations: Fort Hall on the Snake River in eastern Idaho, Lemhi in central Idaho, and the Wind River in western Wyoming (Figure 2).

According to Julian Steward, these people were nomadic hunter-gatherers characterized by a fluid and shifting socio-political organization. To the Northern Shoshone, the unit of “habitual association and cooperation” was the winter village, a unit usually composed of two to fifteen families (Steward 1970a:232). No higher level of political organization, such as a formal band structure, existed (Steward 1970a:247; Steward 1970b:135–8). Instead, the mechanism that served to connect

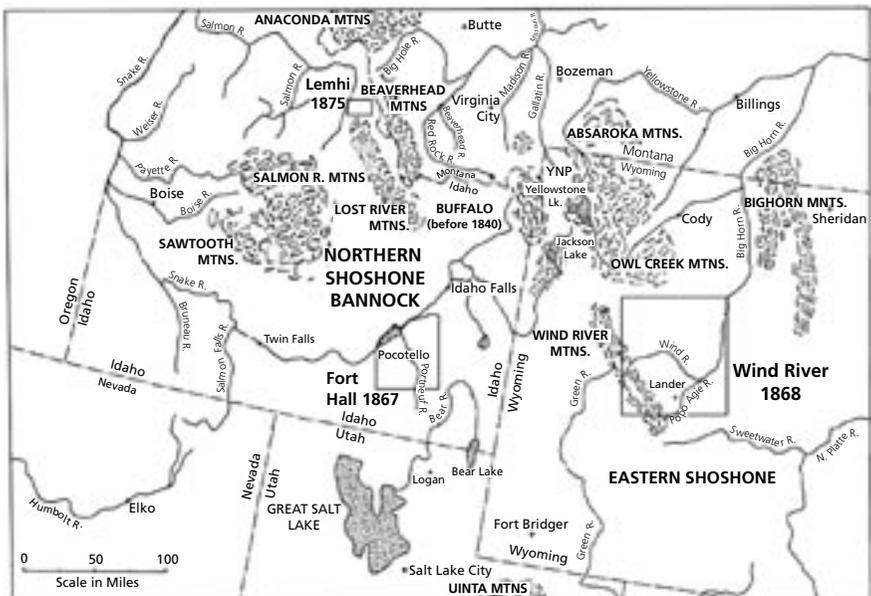


Figure 2. Map of Northern and Eastern Shoshone territory with locations of Shoshone reservations (adapted from Murphy and Murphy 1960: facing page 293).

the Shoshone was a network of temporary and shifting inter-village alliances that extended netlike throughout the entire area (Steward 1970a:248). During the warmer seasons of the year, villages would coalesce into larger groups for communal bison hunting and social functions, or split apart for other economic pursuits. Families could shift their alliance from one village to another or choose to participate in any number of economic pursuits led by temporary leaders (Steward 1970a:248; Liljeblad 1957:16–17; Murphy and Murphy 1960:307–8, 332; Shimkin 1947: 279–80; and Fox 1976:3–4).

In the nineteenth century, a hint of band structure began to develop, especially among the Eastern Shoshone, in response to communal bison hunting, predation by marauding Indians, and the need for leadership when negotiating treaties. The political unrest during this period caused by Euro-American expansion required that Indians travel and cohabit in larger groups for protection, and these larger groups required more formalized leadership. In addition, government officials elevated respected group leaders to greater status as spokesmen and representatives in treaty and other government negotiations. While government officials frequently referred to these groups as bands, the leadership roles were only temporary, and chiefly status was more a non-Indian phenomenon than an Indian one (Steward 1970a:248–9, Steward 1970b:114–6; Murphy and Murphy 1960:313, 332–5).

It was a Shoshone custom to apply food names to people living in certain regions (Steward 1970a:248; Liljeblad 1957:54). According to Steward (1970a:248) and others (Liljeblad 1957:56; Murphy and Murphy 1960:309, 315; Murphy and Murphy 1986:287; Hultkrantz 1970:247), food names did not represent cohesive political units. Sheepeater was one of these food name identifiers, and as Murphy and Murphy (1986:287) note, it is the only food name that passed into English nomenclature. Sheepeater is the English translation of a Northern Shoshone word, *Tūkudeka* or *Tukuarika*, meaning “flesh or meat eater” (‘tuku’, flesh, + ‘deka’, eater; Liljeblad 1957:55; see also Hultkrantz 1970:247; Steward 1970a:186). Those Indians occupying the mountains of central Idaho were loosely referred to as *Tūkudeka*. Because bighorn sheep was the most common meat source in this area, the term has come to mean “mountain sheep eater” (Liljeblad 1957:55; according to Shimkin 1947:277, the Shoshone word for ram was *duk*).

The significance of these food names has caused considerable misunderstanding and confusion among anthropologists, government officials, and explorers (Fowler 1965:64; Hultkrantz 1966–7:160; Murphy and Murphy 1986:287). As both historical records and ethnographic accounts attest, many non-natives have treated these food names as formal socio-political units, i.e., bands (Murphy and Murphy 1986:287; Steward 1970b:135–40). Steward (1970b:135) suspects that this stems from a traditional anthropological belief that bands existed among all hunting and gathering peoples. Because food name designators do not represent formal bands, considerable variation exists in the number and names of those identified among the Northern Shoshone. For example, Hoebel (1938) recognizes 15 bands and Lowie (1909) 10, of which only 8 bands overlap (Table 1). Other ethnographers, such as Steward, recognizing the loose organizational nature of food name groups, avoided their use altogether, referring instead to geographic location as an organizational

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Table 1. A comparison of the Shoshone “bands” identified by Lowie and Hoebel.

Lowie 1909: 206	Hoebel 1938: 410–413
Salmon eaters	Salmon eaters (Agaidika)
Sheepeaters	Mountain Sheepeaters (Tukurika), Lemhi R.
Squirrel eaters	Squirrel eaters (Siptika)
Groundhog eaters	Ground hog eaters (Yahandika)
Pine nut eaters	Pine nut eaters (Tubudika)
Sagebrush people (Pohogwe)	Sagebrush Butte (Pohogoi; also Bannock)
Wind River Shoshone (Gut eaters)	Wind River Shoshone (Pohogoi, sagebrush home, and Kukundika, buffalo eaters)
Seed eaters	Seed eaters (Hekandika)
White knives	
Bannock	Minnow eaters (Pirpengwidika) Rabbit eaters (Kanurika) Big salmon eaters (Piagaidika) Yampa eaters Mountain Dwellers (Doyia), YNP Elk eaters (Parahiadika) Row of Willows (Sehewoki)
<i>n</i> = 10 bands	<i>n</i> = 15 bands

system for the Shoshone (Steward 1970a; Murphy and Murphy 1960; Fowler 1965; Shimkin 1947).

According to Liljeblad (1957:56) and Steward (1970a:248), Shoshone food names loosely identify people who were either living in an area associated with a particular food resource, or who were temporarily participating in the acquisition of that resource. Shoshone informants support this meaning. For example, the Nevada Shoshone might call the Idaho Shoshone “groundhog eaters,” and the Idaho Shoshone might call the Nevada Shoshone “pine nut eaters.” Neither considered themselves members of bands with these names, and only rarely did they use these names to identify themselves (Steward 1970a:172; Shimkin 1947:246). When “groundhog eaters” traveled south to Nevada to collect pine nuts, they would be called “pine nut eaters” (Steward 1970a:172). In a similar way, the Buffalo Eaters of the Wind River Reservation could turn seasonally into either “elk eaters” when hunting elk in the Teton country or “sheep-eaters” when hunting bighorn sheep (Hultkrantz 1970:260, fn 3; Liljeblad 1957:55–6).

Today, Western literatures portrays an entirely different meaning for the word sheep eater. It represents both a formal political unit as discussed above and a cultural-ecological adaptation (Hultkrantz 1970:247; Murphy and Murphy 1960:310). Hultkrantz (1970:247), for instance, tells us that,

The Sheep eaters represented a particular way of living, the ecologically determined way of a primitive, well-adapted hunting people in the mountainous and wooded ranges of the Rocky Mountains.

This new meaning is attached to the word when it first appears in historical writings of the mid-nineteenth century, and exists today.

Several factors may have contributed to the adoption of this new meaning. First, early non-Indian explorers, settlers, and government officials may have misinterpreted the political significance of the term, as most early ethnographers did. If, as Steward suggests, there was an underlying assumption that all Indians formed bands, then in the absence of Shoshone band names, it is easy to see how Sheep eater and other food names were elevated to this status.

Second, another word exists in the Shoshone vocabulary that identifies people with an adaptation similar to that presently associated with Sheep eater. This term is *Dóyani'* or *Tóyani'*, meaning mountaineer, mountain dweller, or mountain settler (Hultkrantz n.d.:152, 1966-7:158; see Steward 1970a:277 for its root, *tóya*, or "mountain" in the Lemhi lexicon).

Hultkrantz's informants on the Wind River Reservation identified certain Shoshone as "Mountain Settlers," or *Tóyani'*. To the Eastern Shoshone, it was a derogatory term referring to impoverished Indians who lived in the mountains away from the encampments of the mounted Shoshone. A mountain settler or mountaineer could be a Bannock (*Pánaiti tóyani'*), a Shoshone, or any other Indian evincing this adaptation (Hultkrantz n.d.:152, 1966-7:158). To non-natives, Sheep eater may have seemed synonymous with mountaineer, and thus, Sheep eater took on the cultural-ecological meaning of mountaineer. In his monograph on Shoshone socio-political organization, Steward refers to those Indians of central Idaho with a mountain adaptation as "mountain villagers" (Steward 1970a:186). Yet later, he refers to them as *Túkudeka* because both Lowie and Kroeber use that identifier (Steward 1970a:187, fn 22). Shimkin notes that the mountain Sheep eaters were also called mountaineers (Shimkin 1986:335). Both references indicate confusion between the two words.

The Indians themselves may have contributed to this change in meaning. According to Liljeblad (1957:56), food names became associated with status in the mid-nineteenth century when band organization and class distinction began to appear. Sheep eaters, as hunters of big game, were highly respected among other Shoshone (Liljeblad 1957:56). If mountaineer was a derogatory term as Hultkrantz notes, then Shoshone mountaineers may have preferred to be identified as Sheep eaters. This misapplication of Sheep eater likely took place in central Idaho through contact with the documented Shoshone mountaineers of that area (Steward 1970a:186-7). Once Sheep eater became attached to this mountain adaptation, it stuck.

Evolution of the Sheepeater Image

ELEMENTS OF THE SHEEPEATER IMAGE were present in early depictions of the Native American long before Sheepeater was identified with that image. An examination of colonial perceptions of the American Indian reveals that the Sheepeater image is a replay of previous images variously called savage, Indian, and Digger. These images are rooted in the wild man image of medieval Europe.

Template for the Image. The template for the Sheepeater image derives from the wild man, a pervasive character in medieval folklore and art (Bartra 1994:2–3; Bernheimer 1970:20; see Figure 3). As described by Berkhofer,

The wild man was a hairy, naked, club-wielding child of nature who existed halfway between humanity and animality. Lacking civilized knowledge or will, he lived a life of bestial self-fulfillment, directed by instinct, and ignorant of God and morality. Isolated from other humans in woods, caves, and clefts, he hunted animals or gathered plants for his food. He was strong of physique, lustful of women, and degraded of origin (Berkhofer 1978:13).

The wild man was more than a passive image in medieval society; he embodied deeply ingrained beliefs. He was loathed and feared, because he was a metaphor



Figure 3. The Fight in the Forest, by Hans Burgkmair I (German), ca. 1500/1503, pen and black ink on laid paper, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund (B-30554).

for the uncivilized, wild, and animalistic part of every human being, that part that must be controlled and tamed (Bartra 1994:7; Bernheimer 1970:20; Thorslev 1972: 281–2; White 1972:28).

As the antithesis of civilized life and the established order of Christian society, the wild man became the universal template to understand all uncivilized peoples encountered during European colonization (Bartra 1994:85–6; Berkhofer 1978: 13; Bernheimer 1970:20; Burke 1972:263–4). The direct association of the Indian stereotype with the wild man image is evident in the interchangeable use of the term “savage” for “Indian” (Berkhofer 1978:13). The sixteenth century French, Italian, and English spellings of savage (*saulvage*, *salvatico*, and *salvage*, respectively) were derived from the Latin word *silvaticus* meaning “a forest inhabitant” or “man of the woods.” The image behind this terminology probably derives from the ancient image associated with the “wild man” or “wilder mann” of Germany (Berkhofer 1978:13).

Over time the wild man template evolved in western culture (Figure 4). The Enlightenment brought an increased interest in antiquities and exotic peoples, and the loathsome, degraded savage was rehabilitated into the *Noble Savage*, a character to be admired. The Noble Savage was no longer a real character, but an ideal, romanticized figure who rose to high status in the refined literature of the latter seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Bartra 1994:167; White 1972:30).

The rise of the Noble Savage provided a second image to define Native Americans, and inspired the distinction between the *good Indian* and the *bad Indian*. The *good Indian*, the Noble Savage, was seen as calm, dignified, brave in combat, and a great hunter. The *bad Indian* was characterized as lecherous, indolent, timid, and thieving, the lowest order of human life (Berkhofer 1978:28).

Due to western expansion in the latter nineteenth century, the Indian was viewed less as an ideal and more as a creature to be despised, incapable of rehabilitation. This change developed in part to justify the extermination and subjugation of the Indian during colonial expansion (Bartra 1994:179; Berkhofer 1978:113; Silverberg 1989: 57–58). Indian stereotypes persist today in American movies, art, and literature, even though modern science has long dispelled these ethnocentric notions (Schullery 1997:22–23; White 1972:6).

In many ways the Sheepstealer image parallels the wild man image. The similarity

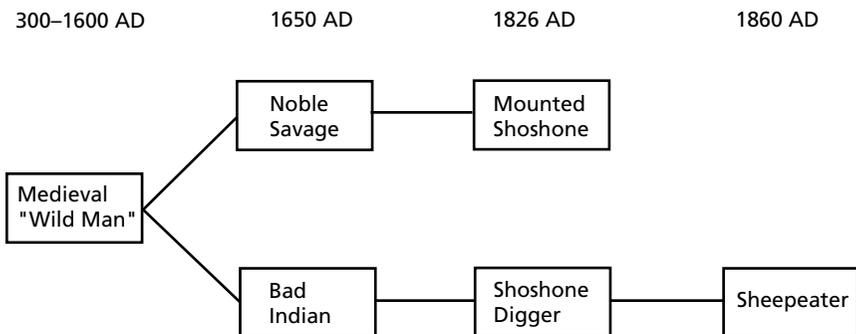


Figure 4. Evolution of the wild man image.

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can be seen when comparing the basic elements of each (Table 2). Both characters were similar in appearance. The wild man was depicted either as a dwarf or giant, a giant when warlike and aggressive, and a dwarf when timid. The timid Sheepeater was depicted as a dwarf. This image was possibly reinforced by indigenous beliefs in the “Little People,” supernatural beings who figured prominently in Shoshone folklore. Unlike most other supernatural figures, the *ninimpi* or *nü'nümbi* were often malevolent. These invisible dwarfs, present everywhere in nature, brandished bows and arrows that caused sickness and death when shot at unsuspecting humans (Hultkrantz 1986:633; Liljeblad 1986:654; Lowie 1924:296).

Both the Sheepeater and the wild man lived in inhospitable and inaccessible regions, areas unfit for cultivation. Agriculture was then and continues to be a defining characteristic of civilized society. Both characters lived a solitary existence, cut off from contact with other human beings. Both lacked intelligence. Both used primitive technology: the wild man is often depicted with a wooden club (Figure 3); the Sheepeater with tools of stone, wood, and horn. Both creatures subsisted on wild

Table 2. Shared elements of the wild man and Sheepeater images (see Bartra 1994, Bernheimer 1970, and White 1972 for elements of the wild man image).

Elements	Wild Man	Sheepeater
Appearance:	Dwarf or giant ¹ ; Semi-bestial; Naked and covered with hair.	Dwarf; Semi-bestial; Dressed in fur.
Habitat:	Lived in inhospitable and inaccessible parts of forests and mountains.	Lived in inhospitable and inaccessible parts of forests and mountains; Permanent residents of Yellowstone Park.
Behavior:	Solitary; Isolated from society; Lacking intellectual capacity; Warlike or timid.	Solitary (single family groups); Isolated from society; Lacking intellectual capacity; Timid.
Habitations:	Lived in the open, caves, or trees.	Lived in caves and rude shelters of brush and fallen timber.
Language:	None or communicated by sensations.	Bannock/Shoshone speakers.
Economy:	Subsisted on plants and animals of the forest.	Subsisted on plants and animals of the forest.
Technology:	Wooden club; Lacked horse transportation; Lacked articles of civilized society.	Primitive tools; Lacked horse transportation; Lacked articles of White trade.

¹ The wild man was often depicted as a giant when warlike and aggressive, a dwarf when timid.

plants and animals, the natural products of the forest. The appellation of Sheepeater implies that these Indians focused their subsistence efforts on the hunting of wild sheep.

In medieval times, isolation was a condition to be feared and avoided because it was linked to insanity and/or ignorance of God. According to Augustinian doctrine, knowledge of God was the prerequisite for further mental activity. Without this knowledge, the wild man was portrayed as insane or mentally deficient (Bernheimer 1970:12; Barra 1994:113). Lunatics in the Middle Ages were rarely institutionalized, often hiding in the woods. Wildness, then, became a synonym for madness (Bernheimer 1970:12; White 1972:4).

The attribution of feeble-mindedness to Sheepeaters may be a carryover of this idea, though Topping (1883:7) attributes feeble-mindedness to winter cold. That climate influenced physical appearance and mental capacity was a common theme in the nineteenth century (Hallowell 1960:59). Climatically induced food privations and other hardships were thought to contribute to a degenerate mental state (Jordan 1965:63,215; Semple 1911:36). Under this premise, the Sheepeaters, who endured high-altitude winters in and around Yellowstone Park, were excellent candidates for feeble-mindedness.

The Sheepeater is always described as a pedestrian Indian. Because the horse was an important symbol of status to both Europeans and Indians, the lack of horses demonstrated the impoverished and degraded state of the Sheepeater. The mounted Indian is often seen as the good Indian, the pedestrian Indian as the bad Indian.

Evolution of the Myth

THE SHEEPEATER IMAGE is not the first application of the wild man template to the Shoshone Indians. Prior to Sheepeater, there existed the contrast between the equestrian Shoshone and the Digger, the good and bad Indian reified. To trace the evolution of the image in Euro-American perceptions of the Shoshone Indians, I examined the historical literature for the terms and images used to identify Shoshone groups. The terms fall into five chronological stages that demonstrate increasing Indian and Euro-American interaction and knowledge of the Shoshone (see Table 3). This research reveals that Sheepeater does not appear in Euro-American literature until 1859, and when it does appear, the Digger image is attached.

The year 1804 marks the beginning of the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the uncharted territory west of the Mississippi River. Up to this point, Euro-Americans knew little about the Indians within and west of the Rocky Mountains. During this era (1804–1814), the first information on indigenous populations was acquired from a small number of trappers and explorers who either encountered these Indians or heard about them from neighboring Indians. Transmission of accurate information was difficult because non-Indians did not know Indian languages, and interpretations were based on personal perceptions molded by the cultural attitudes of the early nineteenth century. The earliest explorers were aware that a group of Indians called Shoshones or Snakes lived west and within the middle Rocky Mountains. At this early date, references to Mountain Snakes appear in the literature,

but these Indians were not referred to as Sheepeaters.

After initial contact, fur traders invaded the Rocky Mountains. Greater diversity in Shoshone culture was observed, but little consistency existed in the identification of these groups, nor were distinct images present. In the Early Fur Trader phase (1812–1826), the Bannocks were introduced into English nomenclature (Elliot 1909:354–6; Bonner 1965:101, 136). Plains Snake replaces Mountain Snake as a subdivision of the Shoshone group. Ross appears to be the first to use a Shoshone food name to identify a Shoshone band (Table 3).

After 1826, the literature reflects a consensus in the identifiers applied to the Shoshone. The Shoshone were divided into three groups: the Bannock, the ‘true’ Shoshone, and the Digger. The latter two carried strong images (Quaife 1934:80; Irving 1910:237–8; Thompson 1855:490; Humfreville 1903:213). The ‘true’ Shoshone were the equestrians who hunted bison while the Digger was the quintessential bad Indian. The lowly Digger is described by Humfreville (1903: 213)

Table 3. Terms used by Whites to identify Shoshone and Bannock Indians since first contact.

Phase	Terms	Year Applied	Sources
V.	CONTINUATION OF PREVIOUS TERMS	1913	Allen (1913)
		1895	Chittenden (1940:8)
		1883	Topping (1883:6–7)
		1881	Sheridan (1882:12)
		1879	Norris (1879:11,26; 1881:35)
		1875	Dunraven (Kephart 1917:246)
IV.	N.W. SHOSHONE	1879	Gatschet (1879:409)
	BANNOCKS	1875	Ludlow (1875); Strong (1875)
	LEMHI R. SHOSHONE (includes Sheepeaters)	1873	Jones (1875:275)
	W. SHOSHONE	1870	Langford (1905:8,25)
	E. SHOSHONE	1869	Folsom-Cook (Haines 1966:17, 21)
	GOSIUTES	1866	Henderson (1866:9/4, 9/11)
	WEBER-UTES	1861	Stuart (Phillips 1957:192)
	UTAHS	1860	Lander (1860:137)

	PAH-UTES	1862–	<i>RCIA</i> (Berry 1871:539–40; Brunot 1872: 127; Danilson 1870:188; Dodds 1868: 148–151; Doty 1864:173, 175; Fleming 1870:178-9; Fuller 1874:264; Harries 1881: 64, 1882:51, 1883:55; Hatton 1880:176, 1881:183; Head 1866:122; Hough 1868: 200; Irish 1865:142-8; Irwin 1874:270–1, 1883:313; Jones 1870:183; Lander 1860: 137; Mann 1862:204, 1864:62, 1868: 156–7; Patten 1878:148, 1879:166; Powell 1868:201; Rainsford 1872:282; Stone 1880: 64; Viall 1871:411; Walker 1872:47–51; Wright 1879:54)
	PAH-EDES	1883	
1860			
III.	SNAKES (SHOSHONE)	1859– 60	Raynolds (1868:79, 86)
	DIGGERS	1860	<i>RCIA</i> (Greenwood 1860:22)
	BANNACKS	1854	<i>RCIA</i> (Thompson 1855:490)
		1853	Schoolcraft (1853:198–203)
		1903	Humfreville (1903:213–215)
		1842–3	Fremont (1853:183, 234–5)
		1841	De Smet (Thwaites 1906:163, 244)
		1841	Wilkes (1845:471–2)
		1836	Bonneville (Irving 1910:237–8)
		1835	Russell (Haines 1965:143–144)
		1834	Anderson (Morgan and Harris 1967:31, 155)
		1832	Leonard (Quaife 1934:79–80)
1826		1830	Ferris (1940:83,107, 241, 248–9)
II.	SHOSHONE (SNAKES)	1826	Ogden (Elliot 1909:354, 356)
	PLAINS SNAKES	1823	Beckwourth (Bonner 1965:101, 136)
	BANNACKS (Dogeaters, Fisheaters, Bannocks) -----F	1819	Ross (Spaulding 1956:166)
1812			
I.	SHOSHONES (SNAKES, CHOCHONIS)	1811	Stuart (Rollins 1935:278, 290–99)
	MOUNTAIN SNAKES	1804–6	Lewis and Clark (Thwaites 1959)
1804	ALIATANS ¹	1904	La Raye (Cutler 1812:194, 198)

¹ Another term for Northern Shoshone (Swanton 1952:403).

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as: "...the most repulsive of all Indians...Faces devoid of intellectual expression as if lower animals; indeed, one could not but notice a strong similarity to wild beasts in their appearance and actions." He adds that Diggers were known to devour horses, grasshoppers, and insects, cavort naked, and live in brush shelters and caves. Bonneville's depiction of a group of Diggers that he encountered in the 1830s mirrors many later Sheepeater depictions:

These are a shy, secret, solitary race, who keep in the most retired parts of the mountains, lurking like gnomes in caverns and clefts of the rocks, and subsisting in a great measure on the roots of the earth (Irving 1910:237-8).

The Shoshone-Digger contrast was universal in the historical accounts of this period, and Digger (also Shoshoko) was applied universally to any Shoshone group without horses and practicing a non-bison hunting economy, whether encountered in the desert or the mountains (Ferris 1940:83; Fremont 1853:183; Haines 1965:144; Irving 1910:224; Morgan and Harris 1967: 154, fn; Quaipe 1934:80; Wilkes 1845:472; Murphy and Murphy 1960:298-9; Steward 1970a:263-4). As late as 1854, R. R. Thompson, Indian Agent for Oregon Territory which included Idaho, identified the Mountain Snakes as a branch of the Root Diggers occupying the country north and east of Fort Hall and south into Bear Valley (Thompson 1855:490).

After the discovery of gold in California, colonization of the western frontiers initiated conflict over land. To protect the lives and the indisputable rights of non-native settlers to Indian lands, the government became involved in Indian affairs (Clemmer and Stewart 1986:530; Schoolcraft 1853:199). Utah Territory was established in 1850 to protect California gold seekers and Mormon settlers (Trenholm and Carley 1981:116). In the 1860s, the United States government began negotiating treaties with the Northern Shoshone for safe passage to the Idaho and Montana gold mines. For management purposes, government officials needed new ways to identify and categorize Indians.

The year 1859 marks the appearance of the first Sheepeater reference in the historic literature. In a message from the president of the United States to the Senate, F. W. Lander, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, identifies six bands of Shoshone Indians within Utah Territory: the Eastern Snakes under Washakie, the Salmon River Snakes (including Bannocks and Sheep-Eaters), the Western Snakes, the Bannocks, the Bannocks of Fort Boise, and lastly the Salt Lake Diggers (Lander 1860:137).

Many historians assume that Sheepeaters were identified by early explorers prior to 1859, but a close examination of this literature reveals that this attribution is given by the editor in a footnote long after the Sheepeater myth was developed. For example, Osborne Russell writes:

Here we found a few Snake Indians⁵⁷ comprising 6 men 7 women and 8 or 10 children who were the only Inhabitants of this lonely and secluded spot. They were all neatly clothed in dressed deer and Sheep skins of the best quality and seemed to be perfectly contented and happy (Haines 1965:26).

In footnote 57, Haines, the editor of Russell's journal, writes,

Probably nomadic Sheep eater Indians, the only aborigines inhabiting the Yellowstone Plateau. They were a branch of the Shoshonean people, small, timid and impoverished. . . (Haines 1965:160).

Note the contrast between Russell's description of neatly clothed, contented Indians, and Haines's description of the impoverished Sheep eater.

In 1863, several small Sheep eater "bands" signed the Treaty at Box Elder, Utah, giving protection to travelers on the road to the Beaverhead and Boise River gold mines (Doty 1864:175; Trenholm and Carley 1981:203–4). The Shoshone who signed this treaty were collectively referred to as the Northwest Shoshone and/or the Boise and Bruneau Shoshone residing in west central Idaho. Sheep eater "bands" appear as a subset of these Indians in the 1864 and 1868 *RCA* reports (*Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*; Doty 1864:175; Hough 1868:200; Powell 1868: 203). In 1869, the Boise and Bruneau Shoshone, under the jurisdiction of the Boise City Agency, were moved to the Fort Hall Reservation and the term sheep eater disappears from the record (Jones 1870:183), only to reappear three years later as a subset of the Lemhi Shoshone.

The Lemhi Shoshone evaded government notice until 1871 when J. A. Viall, Montana Superintendent of Indian Affairs, encountered a large party hunting bison in the Yellowstone River Valley (Viall 1871:415). Destitute and starving because most of the buffalo and other game were gone, these Indians were eager to receive government annuities. Toward this end, Viall removed them to their homeland on the Lemhi Fork of the Salmon River (central Idaho) where a reservation was established in 1875 (Trenholm and Carley 1981:224; Viall 1871:415). Fuller describes them as:

...of mixed blood, it being difficult to ascertain to which tribe they originally belonged. These Indians formed a confederacy many years ago, and have since been separated from other tribes, making their headquarters in this valley (Lemhi), subsisting mainly on salmon fish and mountain sheep, sometimes venturing on buffalo-hunting expeditions in the countries claimed by the Sioux and Crow (Fuller 1874:264).

From this time on, the term sheep eater appears in government census records and other documents as part of the Shoshone and Bannock mix occupying this reservation (Table 4). The reservation population grew from 500 to 1000 individuals in three years as unattached Shoshone groups trickled in (Fuller 1874:264; Rainsford 1872:282). By 1874, Fuller estimated the population to include 200 Bannocks, 500 Shoshones, and 300 Sheep eaters (Fuller 1874:264).

In contrast to the Lemhi Reservation, government census records from Fort Hall and Wind River do not indicate that Sheep eaters were residents of either of these reservations. In addition, ethnographers who have studied the Wind River Shoshone note the difficulty in finding living descendants of the Wyoming Sheep eaters (Murphy and Murphy 1960:309; Dominick 1964:142). Hultkrantz suggests that this may be due to the absorption of these Indians into the Wind River Shoshone prior to 1872

Table 4. The 1872 BIA census record for the Northern Shoshone (from Walker 1872:47–51).

Fort Hall Agency:	Bannocks (516), Shoshones (521)
Lemhi Fork of the Salmon River:	Shoshones, Bannocks, and Sheep-Eaters (677)
Wind River Agency:	Shoshones (1000)

when the reservation was established. Like other ethnographers and historians, he finds the lack of information on the Wyoming Sheepeaters to be as much a mystery as the mysterious Sheepeaters themselves (Hultkrantz 1970:251)!

In the latter 1860s as the Shoshone were being placed on reservations, the Yellowstone Plateau remained unexplored. Rumors circulated of spouting geysers and wonders beyond comprehension. In 1870, the Washburn expedition was organized to investigate these rumors. The fantastic sights observed by this group led to the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, and brought one of the last bastions of American wilderness under government control. During early explorations, numerous Indian traces were observed in Yellowstone Park and were attributed to the Sheepeater Indians. Shortly thereafter, the Sheepeater myth appears in Norris's 1879 report as superintendent of Yellowstone Park. Whether the myth took form with him or he merely put to paper a developed and circulating image is not known.

An interesting sidelight to Norris's role in popularizing the Sheepeater myth, is that he was familiar with the medieval wild man. In his writings, he compares the Sheepeater to the wild man on two occasions. In his 1880 report, he writes, "it is evident that these harmless hermits, these *wild men of the mountains* were...destitute of horses and fire-arms" (Norris 1881:35; see also Norris 1880:11). Norris (1884) was also a romantic as revealed in *The Calumet of the Coteau*, a book of poetry filled with romanticized images describing the wonders of Yellowstone National Park. As his repeated use of the terms "Wonderland," "Mystic Lake," "Goblin Land," and "Sheepeater haunt" attest, he seemed to view the park as a magical, mystical place, homeland to a vanished race of pygmies.

The myth grew in the popular literature of the late 1800s (Topping 1883; Chittenden 1940), culminating with W. F. Allen's book, *The Sheepeaters* (1913). In this book, Doc Allen, a Billings, Montana, dentist claims to have found the last surviving Sheepeater, a 115-year-old woman living among the Crow Indians. In sign language, this woman tells Allen the history of her people, a story that Hultkrantz and others claim is pure fiction (see Hultkrantz 1970:253–56). The romanticized and fantastic stories revealed in this book have done much to perpetuate the Sheepeater myth (Hultkrantz 1970:255).

Although no longer described as pygmies or feebleminded, most of the basic elements of the Sheepeater myth persist today in local folklore and historical writings. Hultkrantz even implies that the myth has influenced the traditional lore of the Wind River Shoshone. He writes that the Wind River Shoshone including the descendants of the ancient Sheepeaters:

...believe in the former existence of a now vanished race of Indians which once lived among the mountains. It seems plausible that the common Shoshoni folkloristic conceptions of the little people, the dangerous, pygmy-like *ninimbi* spirits, have coloured these ideas. Nevertheless, ultimately they probably represent a 'learned' tradition—the tradition of the mysterious Sheepeaters as formed in the white man's literature (Hultkrantz 1970:253; see also Hultkrantz 1981:181, 1966–7:155).

The Sheepeater image is a reincarnation of the old Digger image (Hultkrantz n.d.:152). The historical accounts reveal an evolution of this image, first applied to the mountain Shoshone and later to the Sheepeater when it became synonymous with the Shoshone mountaineer (Figure 4). While Digger continued as the stereotype for the desert dwelling Shoshone, the mountain dwelling Digger was given a new name, Sheepeater (Phillips 1957:192). Any Indian encountered in the mountains and evincing a more primitive Digger lifestyle was identified as a Sheepeater. Unlike the Digger myth, the Sheepeater myth took on a romantic quality, perhaps due to its association with the magical wonders of Yellowstone Park. While the Digger was a vile, disgusting, creature, the vanished Sheepeater was mysterious and ghostly.

Factual Basis for the Sheepeater Myth

AS INDICATED ABOVE, the historical and ethnographic literature consistently place Sheepeaters in central Idaho and the Lemhi Indian Reservation. In contrast, the historical evidence placing them in western Wyoming, especially as permanent residents of Yellowstone National Park, is scant. This latter is surprising since most of the popular Sheepeater literature focuses on the Wyoming Sheepeaters.

In this section, I explore the factual basis of the myth in Wyoming by examining two kinds of information. First, I examine the historical and archaeological evidence of Sheepeaters or Shoshone mountaineers as permanent residents of Yellowstone Park. Because the wood structures encountered in Yellowstone Park and the mountainous areas of Wyoming are attributed to the Sheepeaters, I will explore whether other Indian tribes could have constructed these types of structures.

Sheepeaters in Yellowstone National Park

LITTLE INFORMATION EXISTS to place Shoshone mountaineers in Yellowstone National Park.

One of the earliest references to Shoshone Indians in the park is Osborne Russell's encounter with a small group of unmounted Snake Indians in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone Park on July 29, 1835 (Haines 1965:26; Hultkrantz 1970:250). Because these Indians were unmounted Shoshone lacking Euro-American trade items, this reference is considered one of the best pieces of documentary evidence for the mythical Sheepeaters of Yellowstone Park (Hultkrantz 1970:250). In his journal, Russell fails to identify these Indians as mountaineers, mountain Snakes, or Sheepeaters, nor does he indicate they specialized in hunting bighorn sheep. Further, he encounters them in the middle of summer when any group of

pedestrian Shoshone might visit the Yellowstone Plateau. This reference reveals only that unmounted Shoshone were encountered in the park in July, not that a band of Sheepeaters lived permanently in the park.

The first reference to Sheepeaters in northwestern Wyoming appears in 1866. Bart Henderson, leading an expedition exploring mining possibilities, encountered a group of 60 unmounted Bannock-speaking “Sheepeaters” in the Absaroka Mountains (Henderson 1866:9/4, 9/11). These Indians were returning from a hunting expedition and Henderson traded with them for sheep and marten furs. In 1869, the Cook-Folsom party, sent to explore the geological wonders of the Yellowstone region, encountered a large party of equestrian, Bannock-speaking “Sheepeaters” in Yellowstone Park (Haines 1966:17, 20–21). As Bannock-speaking Indians and horsemen, neither group is convincing evidence of the mythical Sheepeaters. Further, like those Russell met, these Indians were encountered during the summer when the park was accessible. Given the depth and consistency of winter snow (Martner 1986: 107–8) and the impenetrability of snow-covered mountain passes as demonstrated by the Reynolds expedition (Reynolds 1868), permanent occupation of the Yellowstone Plateau would have been nearly impossible for any Indian group (Hoffman 1961:15). The above references reveal that early explorers were prone to identify any Shoshone or Bannock Indians encountered in the park and the mountains of northwestern Wyoming as Sheepeaters.

After the Cook-Folsom expedition, no other explorer, hunter, or visitor to northwestern Wyoming who left memoirs ever encountered a Sheepeater there. The subsequent Washburn expedition did not encounter Sheepeaters or Shoshone mountaineers, although this group observed abandoned Indian structures on the shores of Yellowstone Lake. In 1875, the Earl of Dunraven after conducting a hunting trip in the park, writes “all indians now carefully avoid the uncanny precincts of ‘Wonderland’. A few wretched sheep-eaters are said to linger in the fastnesses of the mountains about Clarke’s Fork; but their existence is very doubtful...” (Kephart 1917:246).

Lastly, Norris never encountered Sheepeaters in his travels through the park (Hultkrantz 1970:252; Norris 1879:842; Norris 1881:35). In 1879, Norris officially removed the Indians from Yellowstone Park, but his report indicates that this action stemmed from the 1878 and 1879 raids of Bannock and Nez Perce Indians (Norris 1879:26; 1881:33).

Most historians and anthropologists assume that the Yellowstone Park Sheepeaters went to live on the Wind River reservation, but government documentation of this is meager. In 1864, Luther Mann, Indian agent of the Wind River Reservation, wrote:

...about the first of June a party of Loo-coo-rekah or Sheep-Eater Indians stole and brought into camp nineteen head of horses belonging to miners at Beaver head, Montana Territory. Washakie, the chief, informed them that a treaty had been made with the whites. They surrendered the horses to him, and he sent them to Fort Bridger and turned them over to the military authority of the post (Mann 1864:172).

From this reference, it is unclear where these Sheepeaters resided, but the

Beaverhead Mines are located in central Idaho near the Lemhi Shoshone (see also Hultkrantz 1970:251). Some evidence suggests that Indians who called themselves Sheepeaters or Shoshone mountaineers did settle on the Wind River Reservation. In 1870, Agent G. W. Fleming wrote (1870:179):

They (the Shoshones)...allowed the Bannocks and Toorooreka, or Sheep Eaters, a band of Shoshones inhabiting the mountains entirely, to participate in the [annuity] distribution, each receiving share and share alike.

This, and a letter in the archives at the Wind River Indian Reservation written by R. P. Haas in 1929 (Haines 1977:333, fn 29) indicate that a group of Sheepeaters or mountaineers arrived on the Wind River Reservation around 1870. Unfortunately, neither account reveals where these Indians resided before joining the reservation (see also Hultkrantz 1970:251).

The later accounts of the exploring expeditions by Jones and Sheridan shed some light on this. Both Jones and Sheridan enlisted “Sheepeater” guides from the Wind River Reservation for their respective expeditions through Yellowstone National Park. In 1873, Capt. William A. Jones enlisted ten Wind River Indians to accompany his troops on a reconnaissance of northwestern Wyoming. One of these guides, Togatee, was identified as a Sheepeater, but Togatee, along with the other Shoshone guides, was unfamiliar with the Yellowstone Park area (Jones 1875:11, 34–36, 39–40). Only when the expedition reached the southern park boundary did Togatee recognize his surroundings.

Sheridan had a similar experience in 1881. He enlisted the help of five Sheepeater guides from the Wind River Agency, and not one was familiar with the park area until the party reached the southern boundary (Chittenden 1940:11; Janetski 1987: 80; Sheridan 1882:11). Sheridan noted that these Indians had lived for years around Mounts Sheridan and Hancock near the southern park border (Sheridan 1882:11).

The ethnographic evidence on this subject is somewhat contradictory and appears influenced by the already established Sheepeater myth. While Murphy and Murphy never spoke to a Sheepeater informant, these ethnographers were told by the Wind River Shoshone that Sheepeaters settled in the Trout Creek section of the Wind River Reservation (Murphy and Murphy 1960:309). Trout Creek is in the southwestern part of the reservation adjacent to the Wind River Mountains. Shimkin’s Sheepeater informants indicated they resided in the Wind River Mountains (Shimkin 1938: 415), yet Shimkin later describes them as forming a semi-autonomous enclave within all the mountains of northwestern Wyoming (Shimkin 1947:242). Hultkrantz’s Sheepeater informants indicated to him that they resided in all the mountain areas of northwestern Wyoming (Hultkrantz 1974b:15; Hultkrantz n.d.:152), but by the time Hultkrantz interviewed the Wind River Shoshone in the late 1940s and early 1950s, legends of the mysterious mountain Sheepeaters as depicted in the Sheepeater myth were part of Shoshone lore (Hultkrantz 1966–7:155).

None of these accounts provide definitive evidence for an enclave of Sheepeaters in Yellowstone National Park. This does not preclude the possibility that the Shoshone mountaineers of Yellowstone Park settled on the Lemhi Reservation as Hultkrantz

(1970:259) suggests, although there is no record of this. While no documentation exists for an influx of Yellowstone Park Shoshone or Sheepeaters to the Lemhi or Fort Hall reservations, abundant ethnographic and historical information demonstrates that Shoshone and Bannock Indians from Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, mounted and unmounted, hunted in or near the headwaters of the Yellowstone River during the warmer seasons of the year (Berry 1871:540; Hultkrantz 1970:260, fn 3; Janetski 1987:46; Jones 1870:183; Schullery 1997:25–6; Shimkin 1947:248; Viall 1871:415).

As an example, J. G., one of Hultkrantz's informants, indicated that his grandfather, Tavonasia, would occasionally hunt in Yellowstone Park. Tavonasia was a well-known Eastern Shoshone chief and warrior during the 1860s and 1870s. His equestrian band of Shoshone wintered in the vicinity of Bull Lake in the Wind River valley and sometimes summered in Yellowstone Park. According to J. G., Tavonasia and his group, who were at one time identified as Sheepeaters, were the only ones under Washakie who hunted in Yellowstone Park (Hultkrantz 1979:37).

In addition to the Shoshone and Bannock, a number of other Indian tribes visited Yellowstone Park and the Yellowstone Plateau during the nineteenth century and perhaps before. These groups included the Crow, Blackfoot, Flathead, and Nez Perce Indians (Haines 1977:21–25; Hultkrantz 1974b:22–8; Topping 1883:7). The Bannock Trail through the northern part of the park was a corridor for western Indians traversing the Rocky Mountains to hunt bison on the eastern Plains. The Blackfoot of western Montana journeyed southward across the Yellowstone Plateau to raid the Crow and Shoshone. The Nez Perce traversed the park in their historic flight toward Canada in 1877 (Haines 1977:221). All these groups occasionally visited the park for economic reasons or to quarry obsidian, but none were permanent residents.

Who Made the Wood Structures in Yellowstone Park? Norris and others have attributed most of the timber structures in Yellowstone Park and the surrounding mountains to the vanished Sheepeaters (Dominick 1964:158–9; Frost 1941; Norris 1880:11; Norris 1881:35–6). Norris variously described the structures he observed as decaying lodge poles, wickiups, cliff-sheltered bush-houses, bush screens for arrow shooting, and pole drive lines (Norris 1880:11; 1881:35). Archaeological surveys conducted in the mid-twentieth century located only a few of the structures described by Norris. Two conical timber lodge sites were recorded in the 1961 and 1966 surveys of Yellowstone Park, the Lava Creek and Wigwam Creek wickiups (Arthur 1966:61; Hoffman 1961:39; Shippee 1971:74). Hoffman (1961:40) noted other pole and brush structures in his survey, but closer examination revealed these to be recent leantos and brush piles. Many more structures probably existed in the 1870s, but the ravages of fire, decay, and recreational use over the years have likely destroyed them (Arthur 1966:61).

Similar types of structures are occasionally encountered outside the park boundaries (Arthur 1966:57, 65–6; Ewers 1968:118; Frison et al. 1990; Kidwell 1969:26–9; Voget 1977:7). These structures fall into four basic categories: conical timber lodges, wickiups, cribbed structures, and sheep traps (Ewers 1968:119–21; Frison et al 1990; Hughes 1994:7–8; Voget 1977:3).

Conical timber lodges consist of 40–60 poles stacked in a conical shape with an exterior covering of sagebrush, grass, woven willow branches, or bark slabs (Figure 1). Lodge interior diameters range from 3.5 to 7 feet. An interior firepit may or may not be present, and artifacts are rare (Arthur 1966:57; Ewers 1968:119–20; Hughes 1994:6–7; Kidwell 1969:23,30, and Voget 1977:7). While most were free-standing, others were built around a tree, or with poles leaning against a tree branch to form a lean-to (Arthur 1966:59; Ewers 1968:21; Hughes 1994:16). Although most historical and ethnographic accounts indicate that these lodges were covered with grass, branches, or bark, by the time they were observed in the twentieth century, all that remained was the pole framework.

While many conical timber lodges are referred to as wickiups (Arthur 1966: 56; Hoffman 1961:35; Lowie 1924:220), wickiups are a different type of structure. These are domed grass huts constructed by bending a circle of four saplings inward in a dome-shape and then covering this framework with grass, rushes, or scrub (Nabokov and Easton 1989:338–9). This type of structure was commonly used as a habitation by western Apache and Great Basin Indian tribes or as a sweatlodge by Plains tribes (Kidwell 1969:2–3; Lowie 1924:184; Murphy and Murphy 1986:295; Nabokov and Easton 1989:338–9).

Cribbed structures are square or pentagonal shelters created by laying fallen timber horizontally. At a height of three to four feet, the timbers were cribbed inwards leaving a smoke hole in the center. The cribbed framework was then covered with grass, stripped bark, or hide (Arthur 1966:57; Ewers 1968:121; Voget 1977:3; Hughes 1994:16).

Sheep traps consist of drive lines leading to a small rectangular catch pen entered by a log ramp. The catch pens are made of high, horizontally laid log courses with inward slanting walls to prevent the sheep from jumping out (Frison 1991:248–252). Frison (1991:257) notes that catch pens bear a close resemblance to cribbed structures. The drive line, a fence of fallen timber and rocks, was used to funnel sheep into the catch pen (Frison et al. 1990; Frison 1991:249). Natural topographic features and nets were occasionally used in lieu of catch pens to trap sheep, leaving only the remains of drive lines on the landscape.

Three of these structures, conical timber lodges, cribbed log structures, and sheep traps, are generally attributed to the Sheepeaters when encountered in the mountains of western Wyoming. Because the lodges, like the mythical Sheepeater, are hidden, isolated, solitary, and primitive, they are easily linked to them. The sheep traps have an even closer link to the Sheepeater because sheep were the focus of their economy.

With the exception of sheep traps, the ethnographic literature reveals that the above structures and their variants were built by most northern Plains Indians as temporary shelters while conducting temporary economic activities and warfare (in Arthur 1966:58; Ewers 1968:128; Hughes 1994:15–17; Kidwell 1969:7). When used by war parties, the structures were referred to as war lodges (Ewers 1968: 117). Lewis and Clark observed similar structures among the Hidatsa (Thwaites 1959, vol. 2:343). Ewers (1968:128) attributes conical timber lodge and cribbed structures to the Cree, Crow, Sioux, Gros Ventres, and Assinboine, while Voget

(1977:8) adds Arapaho, Cheyenne, Flathead and Nez Perce to this list. Voget (1977:8) notes that the Blackfeet preferred cribbed structures rather than conical timber lodges, but according to Ewers (1968:121), the Blackfeet constructed both. The Mandan and Hidatsa constructed conical timber lodges in conjunction with eagle trapping activities (Allen 1982:3). The Shoshone and Bannock were also known to build conical timber lodges and wickiups (Lowie 1909:183–4; Murphy and Murphy 1986:295). Any one of the tribes listed above that visited or traveled through western Wyoming and southern Montana may have constructed the structures attributed to the Sheepeaters.

The ethnographic literature provides little information on which tribes built communal sheep traps in the mountains of western Wyoming, southern Montana, and central Idaho, however, it is known that both the Shoshone and Bannock hunted sheep in these areas (Lowie 1909:185; Shimkin 1947:268). If the Shoshone did build these high altitude traps, then they were built by the *Túkudeka* or Sheepeaters in keeping with the traditional Shoshone use of the term.

While Norris attributed most timber structures in the park to the Sheepeaters, later historians were not so quick to make this association. Haines (1977:25) notes that George Bird Grinnell identified the Yellowstone wickiups as Crow hunting lodges. Dr. Malouf, through archaeological excavations, came to the same conclusion based on the scarcity of artifactual material which he interpreted as indicating transitory use (see also Kidwell 1969:23). Haines (1977:25) attributes the cribbed structures to Flathead occupation. Norris even notes that some recent timber “breastworks” in the park were made by the Nez Perce and Bannocks during their Indian raids (Norris 1881:35).

Evidence is lacking to attribute the campsites and wooden structures in Yellowstone Park and the surrounding areas exclusively to a vanished tribe of Sheepeaters or Shoshone mountaineers. A better explanation is that the timber structures encountered by Norris were temporary shelters and hunting devices constructed by a variety of Indian tribes who visited or traversed the park during the warmer seasons of the year.

Summary and Conclusions

IN SUMMARY, the evidence presented here strongly suggests that the Sheepeater, as portrayed in most historical writings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is more mythical than real. There is no definitive evidence to support the existence of a permanent “band” of Shoshone mountaineers in Yellowstone Park or to indicate that the conical timber lodges and other timber structures in the park were constructed exclusively by these individuals. A better explanation for these structures is that a variety of Indian tribes constructed them during temporary visits to the park during the warmer seasons of the year.

The Sheepeater myth appears to be a Euro-American creation. A Shoshone food name, Sheepeater, was borrowed and misapplied to an existing stereotypical and ethnocentric image of the Native American. This stereotype has roots in the wild man image of medieval Europe. It evolved throughout the history of American

colonization as the good and the bad Indian. The image of the bad Indian became the template to understand and depict the Digger Shoshone in the early nineteenth century. Sheepeater arose as a subdivision of Digger, the mountain Digger with a new name. Once Sheepeater became associated with the impoverished, unmounted Digger of the mountains, the name was applied to any Shoshone or Bannock Indian evincing these characteristics. Like Digger before it, Sheepeater reflected a negative, degraded image to most who applied it until it evolved into the mysterious, romanticized character described by Norris. Once created, the myth took on a life of its own, becoming firmly entrenched in both Indian and non-Indian folklore of northwestern Wyoming. That the Sheepeater myth still stimulates our imagination is testimony to the tenacity of this image.

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A RIDE TO THE INFERNAL REGIONS: AN ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST TOURIST PARTY TO YELLOWSTONE

Lee Silliman



ACCOUNTS OF THE WONDERS to be found at the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, long regarded as trapper and prospector hyperbole, became more seriously entertained when attested to by the esteemed members of the Washburn-Langford expedition of 1870. Montana Territory newspapers and word-of-mouth, as well as some nationally circulated periodicals, spread the party's intelligence that descriptions of the Yellowstone region—far from being exaggerated—had, in fact, been understated. To dispel all doubt, in the summer of 1871 Congress dispatched a scientific exploration party under the leadership of Ferdinand V. Hayden, chief of the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories. The exploits and renown of the Hayden Survey have long been acknowledged.

Before Hayden's party had left the future park, however, another group—hitherto mostly unknown and the subject of this discussion—conducted a sightseeing excursion to “Geyserland” in August of 1871. Because their avowed goal



Photo by William H. Jackson taken in 1872 of Mary Bay, Yellowstone Lake, on the east shore of the lake showing a beautiful “L” curve. YELL 36086. NPS archives.

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was to retrace the steps of the previous year's Washburn expedition—this time to enjoy the sights, rather than explore new territory—these six men are considered Yellowstone's first known tourists. Meeting up in Montana Territory from across the country, they sought the curious and the sublime that subsequent legions of visitors have been drawn to ever since.

The Party

ROSSITER W. RAYMOND: While accounts of the trip do not reveal who organized the party, a reasonable conjecture is that Raymond, being the most educated and well-traveled member, was its de facto leader when decisions were demanded. Fellow party member C. C. Clawson referred to him as “Professor.”¹ Raymond's duties as U.S. Commissioner of Mines and Mineral Statistics from 1868 to 1876 brought him west on frequent inspection tours. His 1871 trip to Helena and Virginia City, Montana Territory, was a pretense to enable him to see the real object of his desire: the mythical environs of the Yellowstone headwaters. Raymond wrote a lengthy account of this sojourn, which was published in contemporary periodicals and in his 1880 book, *Camp and Cabin, Sketches of Life and Travel in the West*. A widely traveled man with a distinguished career, Raymond sentimentally referred to his 1871 trip to “Wonderland” as the high point of his life.

Calvin C. Clawson: C. C. Clawson was a writer on the editorial staff of *The New North-West*, a weekly newspaper published in Deer Lodge, Montana Territory. Growing up in Wisconsin, he attended Waynesburg College in Pennsylvania and sought his fortune in the newspaper business in Kansas, Colorado, and Montana. In addition to owning newspaper interests, Clawson became involved in Idaho mining ventures.² He eventually settled with his wife and son in central Idaho in the late 1870s.

Raymond described Clawson as a shrewd reporter, “interviewing people against their will, following with an intent nose the trails of scandal, picking up scraps of information around the doors of public offices....” Raymond went on to compliment him for taking notes “in secret as a gentleman should,” for being a “jolly companion,” and for his culinary skills in the preparation of “dough-gods” and “bull-whacker's butter.”³

Clawson's 17 installments describing the Yellowstone trip appeared in *The New North-West* from September 9, 1871, to June 1, 1872, under the titles “Notes on the Way to Wonderland; or A Ride to the Infernal Regions” and “In the Region of the Wonderful Lake.” Each section must have been penned not long before its publication, for in the last installment, published three months after President Grant signed the park into law on March 1, 1872, Clawson facetiously whined that he could not preempt and thereafter sell a mountain of brimstone in Yellowstone because “the Park Bill put an end to the negotiations.”

August F. Thrasher: A. F. Thrasher was an English-born daguerrean photographer and owner of the “Sun Pro” Gallery in Deer Lodge, Montana. Drifting into the state from the California and Idaho gold camps in 1868, Thrasher was an itinerant photographer whose peregrinations took him to the many fledgling post-Civil



A photo (1800s) of Sawtelle's ranch near Henrys Lake, Idaho. YELL 33378. NPS archives.

War mining camps that had sprouted up in southwestern Montana. Raymond praised Thrasher, “He invests the profession of photography with all the romance of adventure....If there is a picturesque region where nobody has been, thither he hastens....”⁴

Gilman Sawtelle: Gilman Sawtelle, the first settler of the Henrys Lake region, 15 miles west of present-day West Yellowstone, was the party's local guide. Sawtelle's ranch, 60 miles from the settlements at Virginia City, was an outlier of civilization on the periphery of the Yellowstone Plateau, where he was visited by many travelers. Raymond described him as “a stalwart, blond, blue-eyed, jovial woodsman,” and his accompanying dog, Bob, “an excellent spirit and a companionable soul.”

Josiah S. Daugherty: A prominent businessman and citizen of Wabash, Indiana, Daugherty toured Utah, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming Territories in 1871, purportedly to improve his health. His inclusion in this first tourist party to Yellowstone enabled him to return with “many rare specimens of minerals and fossils.” An 1884 biographical sketch praised him for his business acumen, and for not neglecting “to store his mind with a general knowledge of what is going on in the world about him.”⁶

Anton Eilers: Not much is known about Raymond's assistant and fellow mining engineer. He must have filled a niche, for Raymond wrote that regarding character and accomplishment, “what one of us lacked another was sure to have.”⁷



Josiah S. Daugherty.

The Group's Itinerary

THE GROUP (six men, eight horses, one mule, and one dog) departed on August 10, 1871, from Virginia City, one of Montana Territory's more populated and vigorous cities. Up the Madison Valley they traversed, crossing the Continental Divide via Raynold's Pass to reach Sawtelle's ranch on Henrys Lake for a three-day respite. Via another low pass they returned to the Madison River and progressed to the East Fork (Gibbon River) confluence, where they saw their first geyser. Continuing up the other branch, the Firehole River, the wanderers came to the Lower Geyser Basin, which they erroneously supposed was the Upper Geyser Basin as described by Nathaniel Langford in his *Scribner's* articles. The thermal features amazed them, but did not fit with Langford's descriptions. For reasons unfathomable, they bypassed the Upper Geyser Basin in a brash, two-day thrust to reach Yellowstone Lake on a miserable route blazed by one of Hayden's scouting parties. Their toil was rewarded with the beauty of the lake and the thermal features of the West Thumb Geyser Basin. They moved north to the lake's outlet and followed the Yellowstone River downstream to the Grand Canyon, where they encountered Lt. Gustavus Doane of the Hayden expedition. He informed them that they had inadvertently detoured around the Upper Geyser Basin with its magnificent spouters and pools. Except for Thrasher and Sawtelle, who stayed to photograph the canyon, the rest of the party struck southwest over Mary Mountain back to the Firehole River and upstream to the Upper Geyser Basin. After enjoying the latter, they descended the Firehole and Madison rivers to Virginia City and dispersed homeward.

Encounters With Wildlife

MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY WESTERN TRAVELERS were accustomed to shooting wildlife as their larder or whim dictated, and Clawson's party was no exception—especially considering the fact that no legal strictures against it were in place in 1871. The park's 1872 founding act contained a vague directive for the Secretary of the Interior to “provide against the wanton destruction of the fish and game found within said park,” but it would be 20 years before effective checks against killing park wildlife were in place. While traveling up the Madison River outside the park, Clawson lamented that “as yet we had taken no game—not even a chicken killed or a fish caught—and there was a stife among us to see who would get the first blood.” An eagle was their first victim:

In a short time the eagle hunters made their appearance, with their hats bedecked with trophies in the shape of eagle feathers, and an eagle hanging to the horn of each saddle, while the wings dragged the ground. The old one showed fight when she saw the hunters approaching, and settled down by the nest to protect her young. After several shots from a rifle, she was disabled, and Mr. Raymond climbed the tree as far as possible, threw a rope over the limb, and shook the two young ones out, then brought them to camp. They were monsters of their age, and after admiring them a while, we turned them loose to shift for themselves.⁸

Before we condemn them for a crime against nature, let us ask ourselves what we are perpetrating today with no compunction that our great-great-grandchildren will find odious. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., phrased it, “History is, in no small part, a chronicle of formerly acceptable outrages.”⁹ On the whole, however, the party apparently restricted itself thereafter to shooting elk and fowl to augment their food supplies.

Clawson noted that Yellowstone was a virginal hunting and fishing ground, “where elk and moose and deer and bear have maintained their rights to this their Eden since the day they were given possession.”¹⁰ Raymond concurred, “The forest and the wave alike teem with legged and winged game.”¹¹ Clawson corroborated other early travelers’ observations that wolves were native to the Yellowstone Plateau. On their first night at the lake, when Clawson drew night guard duty, the horses were uneasy.

A band of hungry wolves sat upon a point some distance away and howled and yelped a most heartrending war song that seemed to terrify even our dog, who was a wolf hunter by profession. But with my back to a geyser and the dog and Ballard [a single-shot rifle] in front of me, I gazed into the dark dismal woods and dared either devil or wild beast to ‘tackle me.’¹²

This excursion party offers testimony that Yellowstone abounded with wild game prior to the onslaught of subsequent visitors. Some people have contended that Yellowstone was essentially devoid of mammals (especially elk and wolves) until the late nineteenth century, when white hunting pressure “pushed” the remnant animals up into the mountains. This claim was effectively refuted by Paul Schullery and Lee Whittlesey in their survey of 168 historical accounts of visits to the Yellowstone Plateau prior to 1882.¹³ They found that 90 percent of the remarks relating to wildlife were claims of abundance. As C. C. Clawson wrote, “Elk in bands flew away at sight of us or stood in groups until the crack of the rifle admonished them that they stood in dangerous places.”¹⁴

Notes Upon the Scenic Wonders

C. C. CLAWSON’S RESPONSES TO THE SCENIC WONDERS of Yellowstone were atypical. Whereas many visitors to the park would place Old Faithful Geyser and its companion thermal features in the Upper Geyser Basin as the defining, requisite Yellowstone experience, Clawson devoted a scant seven tepid lines to their description—even though they had specifically looped back to see them. Likewise, the majestic Lower Falls of the Yellowstone and its incomparably colored and sculpted Grand Canyon have transfixed millions of visitors with their sublimity. Of the two, Clawson penned a mere eight terse lines! What *did* grip Mr. Clawson?

The first feature to endear itself was the Madison Canyon. Waxed Clawson, “For wild canyons and grand scenery, the Madison River is not equaled by any stream of its size in the mountains.” He went on to describe the volcanic palisades which hem this river at its second canyon just outside the park: “The mountains of rock run

thousands of feet in the air, and form picturesque sights compared with the smooth, tame valley in front.” Probably not one in a hundred modern tourists stops for a minute’s contemplation of the pleasures of this canyon, in their determined pursuit of the geyser basins upstream. Perhaps a leisurely day-long horseback ride through the Madison Canyon, as opposed to a 45-miles-per-hour passage entombed in a steel and glass conveyance, enabled Clawson to deduce that “here is another great field for artists; and photographers and landscape painters will here find food for the camera and easel.”



Photo taken by William H. Jackson in 1871 of the Grand Canyon, looking down from over the Lower Falls, west side. YELL 36070. NPS Archives.

Clawson wrote of the varied and sometimes dangerous thermal features of the Lower and Midway geyser basins, but the curiosities which in some would ignite wonderment elicited from Clawson only guidebook descriptions. For exhilaration of spirit the author would have to wait until the party topped the divide between the geyser basins and Yellowstone Lake:

Sitting on our horses we gazed and gazed in silent wonderment at the outstretched world below. We were beyond the flight of the Muses... We could not help feeling that we were lifted up BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL, for while the seething, sulphurous lakes were on each side and far beneath us, the placid sky hung in grandest beauty above us.¹⁶

Clawson went on to note that since four great rivers—the Yellowstone, Missouri, Snake, and Green—debouched from the highlands of this massive volcanic plateau, his ken literally encompassed the apex of North America. “This will be one of the most interesting features of Wonderland when Congress shall have set aside one hundred square miles here as A WORLD’S PARK, which it no doubt will.”¹⁷

When Clawson looked upon the vast ultramarine expanse of Yellowstone Lake lying below him to the east, he effused with poetic timbre:

We were at last rewarded for all the trouble and dangers of the journey, when, from a high hill, on which was an open space in the timber, we looked down and out over the grand and beautiful water, clear as glass of finest finish, lying calm and still as death in the evening sun. The like of Yellowstone Lake has not yet come under the eye of or within the knowledge of civilized man. The curious and marvelous sights that encircle it, the wondrous beauty of the mighty peaks that overshadow it as they stand arrayed in gorgeously painted garments of red and purple and yellow like

gigantic sentinels guarding the precious treasure entrusted to their care and keeping; its romantic shores, fringed with forests of richest green, which the frosts of winter or the heats of summer cannot fade; the unequalled beauty of its outline—all unite to enveil it in an unnatural, indescribable appearance; unlike any other spot or place seen or heard of—as if not of this world—something spiritual, beyond the reach of pen or tongue. The eye must behold the glory thereof to believe;

*And even then,
Doubting, looks again.*¹⁸

Clawson concluded his impassioned portrayal of the lake—which he envisioned as the center of a forthcoming national park—by contrasting its present serenity with its past geologic turmoil:

It is hardly possible to realize that it was once a VOLCANO OF WONDERFUL MAGNITUDE, so great, in fact, that it hurled forth from its terrible maw rivers of lava and mountains of fiery substance, which, intermingling as they fell, formed these richly colored peaks that stand to the south and southeast.¹⁹

While Yellowstone's magnetic renown has always included its rare geothermal spectacles and plenitude of wildlife, many tourists, like Clawson, leave the reservation thoroughly enthralled with the sublimity of Yellowstone Lake.

The Party's Attitude Toward Native Americans

C. C. CLAWSON DISPLAYED AN ANTAGONISTIC ATTITUDE toward Native Americans—the norm among whites in Montana Territory then. His references to them indicate that white people still assumed the Yellowstone headwaters was a prime locale to encounter their darker-skinned enemies. This presumption contradicts the myth propagated by some Yellowstone travelers that Native Americans dreaded and shunned this spirit-haunted highland of geysers, hot springs, and cold. Earliest among such sources was fur trapper Warren Angus Ferris, who visited Yellowstone in 1834 and reported that his Pend d'Oreille Indian companions “were quite appalled, and could not by any means be induced to approach them [the geysers]...they believed them to be supernatural and supposed them to be the production of the Evil Spirit.”²⁰ A careful evaluation of the historical record reveals that the supposed Native American fear of Yellowstone's geysers was complex and, at best, only half true.²¹

But fear of encountering Indians on this 1871 trip was pervasive and well founded. According to Rossiter Raymond, their party numbered only six men because a recent raid by Sioux Indians into the Gallatin Valley had unnerved many would-be participants. “When the critical day arrived, there was an amazing pressure of business in the usually somewhat dull town [Virginia City], which hindered every one of our distinguished friends from starting,” Raymond noted sarcastically.²²

Raymond was perhaps unfairly ridiculing the settlers' fear of Indian attack when traveling far from the mining camps, for Montana in 1871 was still a battleground between the races. Blackfeet depredations had been checked only a year prior by the

Baker Massacre, while the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Nez Perce War were still five and six years into the future, respectively. As Clawson's narrative demonstrates, precautions against Indian encounters were standard operating procedures then, and for good reason.

Guards were posted every night during the trip to secure the camp against a surprise attack by Indians or a marauding bear. Clawson professed, "In the mountain countries man has three great enemies he is liable at times to meet with, all of which I acknowledge I fear exceedingly, especially at night. They are the rattlesnake, bear, and noble Red Man." He mused that at least an Indian's silent tomahawk to the brain would be a painless and swift deliverance, "for you lose your life without being aware of it." Still, he slept with his head against a tree as a safeguard against having his hair "'snaked' off in the midst of pleasant dreams."²³

Indian sign was noted on the Madison River near present-day West Yellowstone, where a large grove of quaking aspens was marked with a well-executed deer cut into the bark, presumably to advertise good hunting thereabouts. That same day, "we stopped on the Madison, near where the eight Indians made a camp while on their flight with the twenty-seven head of mules stolen down on the Snake [River] the year before."²⁴ The most direct contact with Indians occurred outside the park, on the party's homeward ride down the Madison River. Discovering a dozen Indian warriors laying in ambush for them on the opposite bank, the party (reduced to four men by then, since Thrasher and Sawtelle stayed to photograph the Grand Canyon) cinched their animals tightly and galloped toward Virginia City. "On they came like demons, but the water was between us." In a 10-mile race the Yellowstone tourists outdistanced their pursuers. "I shall never forget how nicely we fooled those Indians," bragged Clawson.²⁵

The Indian threat was real. In fact, Clawson, whose scalp might well have been lifted by pursuing Indians, was, by the standards of his contemporaries, fairly mild in his damnation of Native Americans. More vitriolic in comparison was the editor of *The New North-West*, who opined two years earlier that the Indian was a "base, bloodthirsty, cruel, treacherous being," whose extermination was the most expedient solution to the racial enmity then gripping the territory.²⁶

Another incident revealed both the vividness of Clawson's imagination and the presumed omnipresence of Indians throughout the Yellowstone Plateau. Not far from the shore of Yellowstone Lake, the tourists chanced upon a small, dilapidated log hut with a collapsed roof. While Clawson could entertain the possibility that it was used by white trappers or road agents,

I am inclined to think that in the first place that homely habitation was none other than a lover's retreat, constructed by some bashful red son of the forest... in anticipation of taking unto himself a dusky partner for life... There used to be a custom, among the native Americans, for a newly-married couple to take a jaunt of a month to some beautiful lake or river, where the bride would be allowed to accompany her hunter to the fishing and hunting grounds, and take part in the excitement of the chase.²⁷

Clawson also conjured up the notion that "the region of the Wonderful Lake is

moreover the 'Happy Hunting Grounds of the Red Man.' It answers his description of it exactly. Here he expects his spirit to wing its way when it leaves the body. A land he pictures in his imagination is abounding in choicest grass for his favorite ponies and fish and game of endless quantity and delicious quality. It is his heaven." By contrast, Clawson imagined that the thermal basins of the Firehole River were the antithetical Indian hell. "On the other side of the great hill, in the Geyser Basin, where the bunch grass is ever short, no fish, game lean, and ponies lank is the 'Unhappy Hunting Grounds,' made ready for his enemies...there their spectral forms, on skeleton cayuses, continually chase, through the alkali swamps, by boiling lakes and sulphurous pits, the fleeing phantom deer."²⁸ Perhaps Clawson's conjecture of happy and unhappy Indian hunting grounds in the park was based upon unmentioned dialogue with Indians or "common knowledge" among area frontiersmen.

Commercial Uses of Yellowstone

C. C. CLAWSON VIEWED THE UNUSUAL GEOLOGY of Yellowstone through the lens of a former prospector. At first sight of a thermal area near present-day Madison Junction, with its rivulet of hot water discharge, he lamented, "It is enough to make the heart of a miner ache to see so much clear hot water running to waste when so many banks of good 'pay grit' have to be laid aside during winter on account of frost." Upon observing that geyserite waters precipitate and adhere firmly to submerged objects, Clawson suggested the making of grindstones by throwing round disks of wood into hot springs, but bemoaned that, "freight is rather high at the present to make this branch of business profitable." He also suggested—perhaps facetiously?—the possibility of employing geyser water for embalming. "It is much pleasanter to 'shuffle off this mortal coil' with the thought that you are going to be embalmed, petrified—*turned into stone*—than to crumble back to mother earth." He jested that we would soon see "the ancient Egyptian mode of preserving the dead not only equaled but eclipsed."³⁰

Clawson's most fanciful, humorous burst was reserved for the Fountain Paint Pots of the Lower Geyser Basin, which he dubbed "the Cosmetic Fountains." He postulated that the economic value of the oil springs of Wyoming would "sink into insignificance when compared with the everlasting fountains of Cosmetic," the latter of which would enrich the treasuries of Montana. (Did he think the territorial boundaries had been moved? There was agitation among Montanans to re-adjust their territorial boundary to include Yellowstone. Then, and for many years thereafter, access to Yellowstone was possible only through Montana, but the effort was in vain.) On he babbled about this cosmetic mineral deposit:

But in a year or two the natural production manufactured under the immediate supervision of Dame Nature herself (who is supposed to know what is best for her daughters), will be all the rage. The same quantity that now costs \$2.00 can be delivered at your doors for five cents, (half white and half pink) perfumed with Extract of Bumblebee, with a picture of a geyser in full blast on one side of the bottle and on the other the inscription

A Ride to the Infernal Regions

*This is the stuff we long have sought
And wept because we found it not.*³¹

Real or imagined commercial uses of Yellowstone were subsumed under the compelling need to declare the newfound wonderland a national park. Throughout his rambling narrative Clawson assumed that Yellowstone would become a pleasuring ground for America and the world. For example, he expected that the shores of Yellowstone Lake would become a resort locale favored by newlyweds, who “wish to get away from the bustle and fuss of home to spend the first sweet month of their new life alone among ‘Nature’s wild, enchanting bowers,’ out of reach of the clatter and bang of the *charivari*.”³² The December 23, 1871, issue of *The New North-West* (three months before the park bill was signed into law) contained an unsigned editorial—strongly bearing the literary fingerprints of C. C. Clawson—describing the wonders of this newly realized “Arcana Inferne.” It concluded:

No soul has permanently shrouded itself from the world within its weird confines: But to it will come in the coming years thousands from every quarter of the globe, to look with awe upon its amazing phenomena, and with pen, pencil, tongue and camera publish its marvels to the enlightened realms. Let this, too, be set apart by Congress as a domain retained unto all mankind, (Indians not taxed, exempted), and let it be *esto perpetua*.

If this essay was not composed by Clawson, it surely expressed his earnest sentiments. Perhaps this editorial was written by Clawson’s superior, James H. Mills, the newspaper’s editor and publisher, who also ventured into Yellowstone one year later. Like Clawson, Mills published his narrative serially in *The New North-West*.³³ Its stylistic and ebullient manner equals, if not excels, that of C. C. Clawson.

The Missing Photographs of A. F. Thrasher

PERHAPS C. C. CLAWSON and his “Ride to the Infernal Regions” would have been more than a footnote to the history of Yellowstone had the journey’s photographs taken by A. F. Thrasher survived and been widely disseminated. Thrasher’s images could have rivaled those of William Henry Jackson, whose national fame was established when his extensive photographic views of Wonderland were displayed to Congress and the public during the debate over the park bill. Clawson’s narrative detailed Thrasher’s conscientious efforts to photograph Henrys Lake, Yellowstone Lake, and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. (Did he photograph the geyser basins?)

No dilettante, Thrasher had his mule heavily laden with the accoutrements of wet plate photography: fragile glass plates, processing chemicals, portable darkroom, heavy camera, and tripod. Each image required an on-the-spot darkroom session to coat the plate with the light-sensitive emulsion. Little wonder then, that he often entered camp late at night “weary, hungry, irate, but victorious.” Cohort Raymond devoted two pages of his memoirs to the indefatigable efforts by Thrasher to “wrestle” with the views. In fact, so “entirely unmanageable” did Thrasher become with his

time-consuming photography that the party split up at the Grand Canyon, with Sawtelle remaining to assist Thrasher, while the other four crossed the Central Plateau to take in the Upper Geyser Basin. Raymond extolled Thrasher's perseverance in "pursuing with tireless steps the spirit of beauty to her remotest hiding-place!"³⁴

In the September 23, 1871, issue of *The New North-West*, the following brief item appeared under "Local Brevities:"

Mr. A. F. Thrasher's outfit collided with a fire near the Geysers: Result, outfit destroyed, save negatives and camera: Sequence, he has returned to complete the series of views.

This cryptic report was corroborated by Raymond: "He got 'burned out' by a forest fire, losing everything *but his negatives* [Raymond's italics] and that after returning to Virginia City, and procuring a new outfit, he posted back again, this time alone, to 'do the rest of that country, or bust.'"³⁵ Thrasher died within four years of the trip.

Where are Thrasher's prints and negatives of Yellowstone in 1871? As a professional photographer Thrasher must have realized the commercial value of these earliest photographs of Wonderland—pictures which he so painstakingly wrought from the wilds and rigors of the upper Yellowstone—yet none are extant today (except for one purported image described below). The crescendo of interest in Yellowstone's wonders would have created a demand for Thrasher's images in Montana Territory and beyond. Had he printed and distributed a goodly number, some likely would have survived to the present.

One Thrasher picture of Yellowstone potentially exists. According to Mary Horstman, Forest Historian for the Bitterroot National Forest, a county historian in Wabash, Indiana, examined a Thrasher Yellowstone picture in the possession of the elderly widow of Josiah S. Daugherty's grandson. Unfortunately, the print could not be produced when Horstman visited the woman in the late 1980s.

At least one person held expectations that A. F. Thrasher's Yellowstone quest would achieve memorable results—his mother, who, as an 80-year-old resident of Grass Valley, California, wrote the following poem for the *Virginia City Montanian* of March 28, 1872:

*News of my wandering son, whose first essay
Through Wonderland its treasure to survey
By fire arrested, were resumed again.
Mid dangers drear from savage beasts and men.
To seek for boiling springs and geysers grand
Amid the perils of that far-off land.
And reproduce them in their bright array
With pencil sharpened by the god of day.*

Yellowstone was first photographed in 1871 by four individuals, yet only the images by William Henry Jackson (who accompanied the government's Hayden

Survey) were widely disseminated to the public which so hungered for them. A Chicago photographer named Thomas J. Hine accompanied U.S. Army Captain John W. Barlow's reconnaissance of Yellowstone, but his negatives were destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. Recently, seven Hine prints were identified in the Print Room of the New York Historical Society, including the first known photograph of Old Faithful in eruption. A Bozeman photographer, J. Crissman, also accompanied Barlow, but his pictures were not widely distributed and were often misattributed to others. Three men—Thrasher, Hine, and Crissman—were poised to exploit their presence in Yellowstone on the eve of the park's birth, but fate turned its hand against them.³⁶

The First of Many

THESE FIRST SIX YELLOWSTONE TOURISTS had much in common with the succeeding multitudes: an appreciation of the unique and awe-inspiring geological phenomena that undergirds the region's appeal; an awareness of the varied wildlife heritage native to the plateau; and a cognizance that Yellowstone's commercial potential would be best managed through the mechanics of public ownership. Most telling, however, was their poignant, emotional response to this place where "the gates of the Infernal Regions were not only ajar but clear off their hinges," as Clawson emphatically phrased it. How fitting it is that Wonderland's first tourist could verbalize the elixir that still permeates the air and imbues itself upon the visitor:

Those who may hereafter visit this strange land will bear me out in the assertion that a peculiar sensation takes possession of the visitor which cannot be dispelled, that he feels he is in a land akin to spirit-land. Why this feeling, I am unable to explain; but it being the old pleasure grounds of the aborigines for many ages, and the place designated by them as the eternal abiding place of the spirits of their departed good, as well as the peculiar effect the exceedingly light air (barring the hurricanes) has upon the respiratory organs, the wild and fascinating scenery—all may have something to do with this strange feeling taking possession of the stranger.³⁷

Endnotes

1. See Mary C. Horstman, *Taking Up the Tools: The Early Career of Rossiter Worthington Raymond, 1867–1876* (University of Montana, Master's Thesis, 1989).
2. The Calvin C. Clawson Collection (Manuscript 165) is housed in the Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, Idaho.
3. Rossiter W. Raymond, *Camp and Cabin: Sketches of Life and Travel in the West* (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1880), p. 157–159.
4. Raymond, p. 157.
5. Raymond, p. 155, 159.
6. *History of Wabash County, Indiana* (Chicago: John Morris, Printer, 1884).
7. Raymond, p. 159.
8. C. C. Clawson, "A Ride to the Infernal Regions," *The New North-West* (Deer Lodge, Montana Territory), September 30, 1871.
9. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Men Behaving Badly," *New Yorker*, August 8, 1997, p. 4.

10. Clawson, January 27, 1872.
11. Raymond, p. 169.
12. Clawson, January 27, 1872.
13. Paul Schullery and Lee Whittlesey, *The Documentary Record of Wolves and Related Wildlife Species in the Yellowstone National Park Area Prior to 1882*, (Yellowstone National Park, Division of Research, 1992).
14. Clawson, May 18, 1872. For an overview of nineteenth century human influences on Yellowstone wildlife, see Paul Schullery, *Searching for Yellowstone: Ecology and Wonder in the Last Wilderness* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), p. 68–88.
15. Clawson, October 14, 1871 and November 18, 1871.
16. Clawson, January 13, 1872.
17. Clawson, January 13, 1872.
18. Clawson, January 27, 1872.
19. Clawson, January 27, 1872.
20. Warren A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains 1830–35* (Salt Lake City: Rocky Mountain Bookshop, 1940), p. 205.
21. See Åke Hultkrantz, “The Fear of Geysers Among Indians of the Yellowstone Park Area” *Lifeways of Intermountain and Plains Montana Indians*, edited by Leslie B. Davis (Bozeman, Montana: Montana State University, 1979); Joel C. Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone National Park*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); and Joseph Weixelman, *The Power to Evoke Wonder: Native Americans and The Geysers of Yellowstone National Park* (privately printed, July 19, 1992).
22. Raymond, p. 154.
23. Clawson, September 16, 1871 and October 14, 1871.
24. Clawson, November 11, 1871.
25. Clawson, June 1, 1872.
26. *The New North-West*, August 27, 1869, p. 2, col. 1 & 2.
27. Clawson, February 10, 1872.
28. Clawson, February 10, 1872.
29. Clawson, November 18, 1871.
30. Clawson, November 25, 1871.
31. Clawson, December 2, 1871.
32. Clawson, February 24, 1872.
33. James H. Mills, “The Grand Rounds. A Fortnight in the National Park” *The New North-West* (Deer Lodge, Montana Territory), September 28–November 30, 1872.
34. Raymond, p. 156–157.
35. Raymond, p. 157.
36. Consult *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*, Summer, 1999, p. 2–37, for an extensive discussion of Yellowstone’s earliest photographers.
37. Clawson, May 18, 1872.

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AN INDOMITABLE SPIRIT: DR. CAROLINE MCGILL

Connie Staudohar



THE PROFESSIONAL WORKING WOMAN of today heads off to catch a bus with a computer slung over her shoulder and a cardboard coffee cup in her hand. If asked where she was heading she'd likely say, "back to the real world." If we replace the computer with a black medical bag, and the race to the bus with a race to the livery stable, we might ask the same question to Dr. Caroline McGill some eighty years ago, and receive a similar answer. Dr. McGill, like her modern counterpart, grappled with balancing the demands of the "real world" with her need for recreation. She knew she needed both. The "relaxation of the outdoor life" made it possible for McGill to carry on her heavy medical practice.¹ The 320 Ranch in the Gallatin Canyon—just five miles from the northwest corner of Yellowstone Park—became Dr. McGill's counterweight to her life in Butte. If Butte was her workplace, the 320 Ranch was her heart and soul place.

Dr. McGill first viewed the Gallatin Canyon in 1911 from the back of a bobsled. The strands of hair that escaped from under her cap went untucked—her hands lay burrowed inside thick gloves and heavy wool blankets were layered around her from head to toe. As much as anything, she resembled the wrapped and bundled forms of the tubercular patients she had left behind in the Butte hospital. McGill herself had been consumed by the daily rounds of a busy hospital since her arrival in Butte less than a year before. She didn't hesitate when two of her medical colleagues suggested she join them on a hunting trip in the Gallatin Canyon.

In retrospect, it seems serendipitous that Dr. McGill should have toured the Gallatin as her first real excursion away from Butte. In October of 1911, just a month before she set out for the hunting trip, Butte had had the worst snowstorm in its recorded history. Twenty-four inches of snow had fallen in twenty-four hours. The heavy, wet snow had broken the telephone, telegraph, and power lines. For nearly a full week, Butte had been isolated from the rest of the world.² That meant that McGill, and the rest of the staff at the Murray Hospital, had had to meet the basic needs of their sick and dying patients without such basic services as lights, heating, or call bells. It had been an exhausting ordeal, and a frightening one. Dr. McGill needed a vacation, and so did the Murray's head surgeon, Dr. Witherspoon. The two gratefully boarded a train and headed for Bozeman where they would meet up with Dr. Safely, their friend from Livingston.

Dr. Safely owned a homestead in the Upper Gallatin near the Yellowstone Park boundary. He planned to build a sanitarium for diabetics there because he thought they would benefit from the fresh air, year-round spring water and good home-

cooking. He knew tuberculars had benefited from their stay at the Michener Camp in the canyon, and had fared well in their walled tents.³ Now, however, his primary concern was to provide a comfortable respite for his friends. He planned to meet them in Bozeman, board the electric train with them to Salesville (now Gallatin Gateway), transfer to bob sled, and get midway up the canyon to Karst's Ranch that night. It would take almost another full day on the sled before they would reach his homestead at Snowflake Springs.

When the hunting party crossed Buffalo Horn Creek the following day they were told they were getting close to their destination. They were also told that the Buffalo Horn Creek Resort was one of the few active dude ranches in the canyon. Like Dr. Safely, many other canyon residents had informally hosted hunters in the fall and winter. As more people from cities toured Yellowstone National Park, stories of the large elk herds and other plentiful game in the area spread among hunters. Providing board and room for these hunters brought in some much-needed cash. Sam and Josie Wilson, owners of the Buffalo Horn Resort, had started their year-round dude business in 1907. That same year, the Michner Camp in the canyon advertised nationally in *Field and Stream*. These early dude ranches charged \$12 a week for room and board and \$6 for a horse and saddle.⁴ In addition to lodging and hunting, however, the dude ranches offered a sense of peace and quiet. It was this combination—adventure and rest—that appealed to Dr. McGill; she made a note to herself about the Buffalo Horn Resort after she had settled at the Safely homestead.

Dr. McGill spent several days looking for game and exploring the canyon. There appeared to be more hunters than wild game, and although she left empty-handed she felt restored and well cared for. She later noted in her journal that “no sister or mother could have been more respectfully treated,” and added that the men “never did overstep the bounds of the greatest dignity and propriety.”⁵ If propriety had been a concern before the trip, it was not a concern afterwards. McGill's “maiden voyage” in the company of men had assured her that maidens like herself were quite safe.

McGill fit into a certain “New Woman/New Century” stereotype of independence, adventure, and risk.⁶ She was born near Ontario, Ohio, in 1879, on a farm her great-grandparents had owned. Her family had little income and in 1885 they moved to a rocky, brush-covered farm in Lebanon, Missouri, in the hopes of bettering themselves. The McGill farm was surrounded by the hardwood forests of the Ozark Mountains. Once her chores were done, Caroline, the second of five children, was free to roam in the woods and along the streams, and was encouraged to learn the name of the birds and flowers. The McGill children were all sent to the local school. Caroline thrived, and by the time she was seventeen was herself teaching grade school in order to save money for a university education.

Caroline entered the University of Missouri in the summer of 1901. At the end of the session, she was asked to stay on to assist with a science class in the fall. It was the chance she had waited for: she would be able to continue her studies at the university and still have a small income. In rapid succession she earned her B.A. in 1904, an M.A. in 1905, and a Ph.D. in Anatomy and Zoology in 1908. She had the added distinction of being the first woman to earn a doctorate from the University of Missouri.

With her heart devoted to science, Dr. McGill embarked on a long journey of career development that spanned roughly the next twenty years of her life. She studied at the University of Chicago with Howard Taylor Ricketts, the well-known scientist who spent his summers in Montana researching the connection between ticks and the deadly illness, Rocky Mountain spotted fever. There was additional study at Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory in Massachusetts and she received the Sarah Berliner Scholarship in 1909 for post-doctoral scientific study abroad. She attended the University of Berlin, studied at the Institute of Marine Studies in Naples, Italy, and returned to Germany to study at the Tubingen Institute. Towards the end of her stay in Europe a former Missouri colleague invited her to come to Butte to become the state's first pathologist. Dr. McGill deliberated the offer and spelled out her spirited decision in a postcard to her Mother: "I'll tell you right now I am making the biggest fool mistake to go. But it's all done and I have to let her rip."⁷

Dr. McGill's arrival in Butte on December 31, 1910, forged a period of local identity where she further distinguished herself. She stayed for two years as the resident pathologist at the Murray Hospital before going to Johns Hopkins University to medical school. During this short time, Butte had definitely become her home and Montana her touchstone. McGill returned in 1914 with a medical degree and for the next forty-five years doctored the miners and their families, the well-to-do and the ne'er do well, and just about everyone in between.

Dr. McGill worked tirelessly. Two examples illustrate how demanding a place Butte was to practice medicine. In 1917, a fire in the Speculator Mine claimed the lives of 165 miners—every doctor in Butte was called to the scene and rescue work continued for eight days. Many of the 245 survivors, and members of the rescue crew, were in need of medical treatment and admitted to the Murray Hospital. In 1918, the Spanish flu epidemic caused 1,000 deaths in Silver Bow County alone. Two young nurses at the Murray Hospital contracted influenza while caring for patients and they died within days of each other. For many of her stricken patients, McGill assumed the role of both doctor and nurse throughout the long months that the virus ran its course.⁸ Dr. McGill opened a private practice, and in 1919 bought a large building where she maintained her office, her residence, apartments for friends and space to house her growing collection of antiques. If McGill fit the daring "New Woman" image at the turn-of-the-century, she had become an established "modern woman" with a demanding career and need for balance by the 1930s.

Dr. McGill bought her first car in 1918. This second-hand Reo made her long list of house calls easier and allowed her to take drives to the countryside. Eventually, Dr. McGill took an occasional weekend off to head to the river to fish, or the mountains to hunt. In October 1924 she went to the Madison with her friend, Mr. Joe Reau. "Up early," she wrote. "Got 3-spike buck at 5 PM. Next day hunted on top of [mountain]. Scared many deer down, and next AM hunted geese from decoy pit in wheat field. Plenty of geese. Fished in PM & home."⁹ She hadn't forgotten the Buffalo Horn Resort and headed there for a weekend in early August of 1930. She mentioned in her journal that she rented a horse and rode alone to Ramshorn Lake where she caught twelve trout. She made it back to Butte by 11:30 that night.¹⁰ After

several visits to the Buffalo Horn over the following several years, Dr. McGill made an offer to buy the entire resort in 1936.

Dr. McGill's thriving medical practice gave her financial freedom. She paid Mrs. Josie Wilson \$6,000 in cash for the resort and promised to give her a home there for as long as she wanted. She convinced Susie and Park Taylor, who had managed a ranch on the Madison River, to move to the ranch and operate the cattle and dude operation. In addition to the change in ownership, the resort had changed names. Sam Wilson's father had purchased the adjoining homestead and the combined land added up to 320 acres. The resort became known as the 320 Ranch—McGill referred to it simply as the “320.”

While many of us have created a “shadow life, the life that we would live, if and when, if only and when only,”¹¹ Dr. McGill created a manageable alternative to her urban work life. McGill envisioned the 320 as a place of renewal for herself, her friends and family, and for her convalescing patients. The 320 renewed McGill, and she poured her efforts into renewing the 320. Dr. McGill and the Taylors refurbished the run-down cabins. Old mattresses were restuffed, and McGill's antiques—old clocks, silver teapots, and marble-topped tables—were redistributed among the cabins. Electricity, fueled with a gasoline-fed generator, came to the 320 in 1938—eleven years before an electric line allowed for lights in the rest of the canyon.¹²

McGill took delight in the ranch. On her own, or with her friends, McGill rode horses through the mountains, fished the alpine lakes, and organized hunting parties in the fall. Her journal entries reveal her love of the outdoors, her keen sense of observation, her devotion to her friends, and her pleasure in the life she found in the canyon. “To [the] “320” with Dr. Sarah Graff and her Father,” she wrote in June of 1938. She continued with, “To Ramshorn lake with the Graffs fishing. Dog tooth violets, Elk. Full moon.” The following day she added, “To Dier place. Mrs. Graff. Mr. Benson. Bought old china and glass.”¹³ The journal entries always ended with “back to work.” Back to the real world.

Even though her work world continued to be demanding, the 320 was not used as a retreat or a place to take refuge. She lived an engaged life in Butte, and an equally engaging life in the Canyon. Her practice in Butte continued to call for her compassion and skill. A partial list of autopsies performed in 1939 in Butte indicate that McGill was involved in cases ranging from death due to criminal abortion to chronic silicosis-related deaths.¹⁴ McGill maintained a professional distance with patients and most colleagues in Butte, but had cherished friendships with two Butte women who also shared her enthusiasm for the 320. Their frequent visits to the ranch forged a link that bound together McGill's more private life in Butte with her outgoing and relaxed role at the 320.

Miss Thula Rodes and Mrs. Elizabeth Lochrie were professional women in need of a break from the “real world” every bit as much as their friend, Dr. McGill. Miss Rodes' friendship with McGill stretched back to their college days in Missouri. It was her older brother, Dr. Charles Rodes, who had asked McGill to come to Butte in the first place. Thula served as Dean of Girls at Butte High School for many years and invited McGill to speak at the Friday afternoon girls' assemblies. McGill discussed personal hygiene and encouraged the girls to take swimming classes, not to learn

to swim but rather to take advantage of the school's showers.¹⁵ McGill purchased a new Buick in 1940 and headed to the 320 with Thula. "Cannot recall such a clear August," McGill noted. "All hay cut, barn full, big stack. Barn dance—500 people. Fine summer."¹⁶

While Thula shared in some of McGill's social life at the 320, Butte's noted artist, Mrs. Lochrie, spent her time painting and going horseback riding with McGill. "Left late with Mrs. Arthur Lochrie for 320," McGill wrote in September of 1940. Mrs. Lochrie sketched all day the following day, and then she and McGill took a long ride in the mountains. McGill noted the "lovely autumn color" and then the inevitable, "home to Butte."¹⁷

Just as the 320 Ranch contributed to Dr. McGill's well-being, her own contributions to the Gallatin Canyon became more evident as time went on. She made sure she knew what was going on not only at the ranch, but also in the canyon in general. Just as she had collected antiques and everyday artifacts in earnest when she realized that Butte's unique culture was changing, she began to collect stories from the old-timers in the canyon when she saw how their generation was passing. She carefully recorded these stories in her nearly illegible doctor's scrawl, then later her secretary transcribed them.

McGill invited folks to come to the 320 to share their stories, and also visited them in their homes. If necessary, she wrote to people. One respondent stated "I'm afraid I am not the person for whom you are looking." At the bottom of the page McGill included a note of her own. "I still think it was the same [person]. Try to find out."¹⁸ These collected histories are a window into the past of Gallatin Canyon and the North Entrance of Yellowstone Park, and at the same time, they provide a glimpse into McGill's involvement in the canyon. One story involved Mr. Stanley Davis and his extended family. In addition to learning who married who and where they settled in the canyon, McGill ferreted out the fact that his nephew had been the driver of the bobsled on her first trip to Snowflake Springs. Another nephew had been a patient of hers in Butte. She noted his diagnosis as matter-of-factly as the location his uncle had herded cattle.

Stories about Dr. McGill were widely circulated even though she was reluctant to talk about herself. One incident canyon people loved to repeat was a Good Samaritan story of sorts. On one of McGill's many trips up the canyon she met some women who had run off the road and were stuck. McGill grabbed a shovel from her car and went to work. Soon the car was free and one of the women said to the doctor in awe, "You're Dr. McGill aren't you?" "Yep," replied McGill, "and the best damned shoveler in Gallatin County," at which point she was said to have hopped into her car and drove on.¹⁹

As well, Dr. McGill cared about the land and the animal populations in the canyon. She left an easement along the riverfront of her property so fisherman could have access. She became a charter member of the Wilderness Association, and attended meetings of the state fish and game department and the forest service whenever they discussed the future of the elk in the canyon. She acquired additional acreage including twelve sections of Holter lands on Taylor Creek in 1941, and the Porcupine Ranch on Porcupine Creek in 1945. In 1950 Dr. McGill agreed to sell this

particular land to the state department of fish and game for use as elk winter range.

The issue of elk management had been a long-standing debate in the canyon stretching back at least to the 1890s when big game limits had first been set. These early limits allowed eight deer, eight sheep, eight goats, two moose, and two elk per hunter. Many hunters came into the Gallatin Canyon to get their elk quota. Concern and debate about the Gallatin Elk Herd continued for the next half-century and McGill's decision to sell her land in the interest of the elk was a sensitive move. This McGill property, along with a few other parcels, became the Porcupine Game Range, a refuge used by park elk in the winter when the deep snows drive them from Yellowstone.²⁰

If Dr. McGill's long and productive life is compared to a colorful, complex mosaic crafted piece by piece then it is in the final five years of her life that the tile is completed, and the full image revealed. Her professional life, her antique-collecting hobby, and her beloved ranch all overlapped in the end creating a series of events that afforded McGill the recognition she deserved, while at the same time allowed her to disperse her dearly-held possessions. An honorary doctorate, bestowed on McGill by Montana State College in 1955, recognized McGill's accomplishments in the medical field, and in historic and wilderness preservation.²¹ By the time Dr. McGill received her honorary doctorate, she was seriously searching for a public home for her vast private antique collection. Through the cooperation and efforts of President Renne and historian Merrill G. Burlingame, Dr. McGill was allocated three World War II quonset huts on the Montana State College campus to begin a museum.

Dr. McGill had retired from her Butte medical practice in August 1956. By September, hundreds of items were moved from her apartment building in Butte to the quonset huts. After months spent cataloging items, constant cleaning and sorting, and committee meetings, the Quonset Museum opened on February 12, 1957. Within a year the Quonset Museum moved and an old dairy barn became the Museum's new home. Dr. McGill planned to spend time working in the barn museum during the winter just as she had in the quonsets. However, her health failed and most of her time was spent at the 320 where she died on February 4, 1959, at the age of seventy-nine. Dr. McGill did not live to see the evolution of the McGill Museum into the Museum of the Rockies, but her role as founder is recognized by a stately bronze plaque in the facility's main lobby.

Throughout her life Dr. McGill was a personal benefactor to many individuals and causes and her last will substantiated this life-long pattern of quiet generosity. She left land to the Goodriches, the 320 managers, and the option to purchase both the 320 Ranch and the Holter lands on the Taylor Fork. They bought both and the proceeds went to McGill's surviving brother and sister. In addition to the core collection left to the Museum of the Rockies, McGill established a sizable building fund for the museum. Other contributions included monies left to the Gallatin Canyon Women's Club which they used in 1963 to modernize Ophir school, and there was a distribution to some of her close friends from Butte.²²

Nearly fifty years had passed between Dr. McGill's first trip to the Gallatin Canyon in 1911, and her burial in the small cemetery at Soldier's Chapel in the canyon. A well-balanced life unfolded over those years that embraced both a

demanding professional career, and a rich outdoor life shared with friends and family. From her earliest beginnings on a small farm in the Ozarks, to her years in Butte, and eventual retirement to her beloved 320, Dr. McGill's gifts of scholarship, leadership, and philanthropy resulted in remarkable outcomes for the people of this region.

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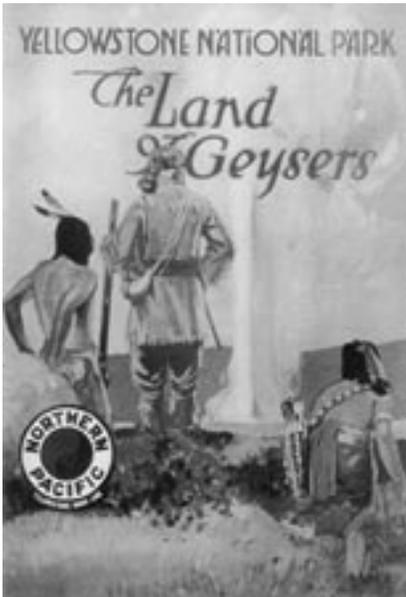
FEAR OR REVERENCE? NATIVE AMERICANS AND THE GEYSERS OF YELLOWSTONE

Joseph Owen Weixelman



WHEN TWO PEND D'OREILLE INDIANS guided trapper Warren Ferris along Yellowstone's Firehole River in 1834, he wanted to see the geysers and hot springs he'd heard about at the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous, an annual gathering of mountain men held under the auspices of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. He later wrote in his journal:

I ventured near enough to put my hand into the water of its basin, but withdrew it instantly, for the heat of the water in this immense cauldron, was altogether too great for comfort, and the agitation of the water, the disagreeable effluvium continually exuding, and the hollow unearthly rumbling under the rock on which I stood, so ill accorded with my notions of personal safety, that I retreated back precipitately to a respectful distance. The Indians who were with me, were quite appalled, and could not by any means be induced to approach them. They seemed astonished at my presumption in advancing up to the large one, and when I safely returned, congratulated me on my "narrow escape."— They believed them to be supernatural, and supposed them



Historical representation of Indians' timidity at an erupting geyser. Note the confident stance and lead position of the fur trapper juxtaposed with that of his native companions, possibly portraying the Warren Ferris account. From a park guide entitled "Yellowstone National Park: The Land of Geysers" published in 1917 by the Northern Pacific Railway. Yellowstone museum collection.

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to be the production of the Evil Spirit. One of them remarked that hell, of which he had heard from the whites, must be in the vicinity.

Ferris's report has often been adduced as evidence that Indians feared Yellowstone's geysers, an assumption that was relayed to early visitors to Yellowstone and became the prevailing view among social scientists. However, hundreds of years before the first Euro-Americans gazed on the Firehole Valley, many American Indians went to the geyser basins to pray, meditate, and bathe. Most native peoples revered the land of Yellowstone and many treated it as sacred in their cosmology. While a sense of fear may have been linked with the geysers and hot springs, the belief that this was the predominant emotion or indicated a primitive intellect is mistaken. Instead, it is more accurate to say that American Indians understood the area to be linked to the powers of their Creator, powers that were difficult to understand and could be dangerous. Such a place had to be properly respected and one could not take a journey there lightly. A different impression of native attitudes toward Yellowstone can be arrived at by deconstructing trapper accounts like those of Ferris and supplementing them with oral histories, archeological evidence, and other sources.

A common problem in Euro-American perceptions of American Indians is a tendency to regard them as a single culture. Native North America can be divided into a dozen cultural regions, each with distinctive economic, political, social, and religious systems. Yellowstone National Park lies near the junction of three of these cultural regions—the Great Basin, the Plateau, and the Great Plains—where wide variations in native perceptions of Yellowstone could occur. Cultural differences may also be found even between bands of the same tribe. If it is misleading to speak of Indian culture as a monolithic entity, it is equally deceptive to speak of an Indian fear of Yellowstone. Different tribes and bands responded to the geysers differently, just as they responded to Euro-Americans differently.

Native Americans in Yellowstone

PEOPLE HAVE INHABITED THE YELLOWSTONE REGION for at least the past 7,500 years. Although archeological evidence has been found of Paleo-Indian presence in the thermal basins, the first written historical record indicates that the native peoples who resided closest to the Yellowstone region at the start of the nineteenth century included the Blackfeet, Crow, Shoshone, and Bannock. The territorial boundary for these tribes was formed by the high mountain ranges that come together there.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 recognized Blackfeet lands as those to the north and west of the Yellowstone River. As fur trappers ventured into this area, the Blackfeet were possessive of their territory and battled Euro-Americans over the game found there. The same treaty recognized Crow title to lands to the south and east of the Yellowstone River. Fur trapper Edwin Denig identified their lands as including some "boiling springs" in the vicinity of the upper Yellowstone and the Crow warrior, Two Leggings, spoke of a trip there in his youth. As European diseases took their toll on tribal numbers, the Blackfeet slowly departed from the region and ceded their claims to the Yellowstone Valley in the Treaty of 1855. However, when Yellowstone



Map of approximate tribal territories in and around the Yellowstone plateau, circa 1850. Map courtesy Peter Nabokov and Larry Loendorf from Restoring a Presence: A Documentary Overview of Native Americans and Yellowstone National Park, forthcoming from the University of Oklahoma Press.

National Park was established in 1872, the extreme northern portion of the park (east of the Yellowstone River in Montana) was actually part of Crow territory until a council in 1883 agreed to cede this mountainous land and move the tribal agency eastward.

The claims of the Shoshone and Bannock, who lived west of the Continental Divide where the terrain was poorly understood by the treaty-makers, were not formally recognized by the Treaty of 1851, but their presence in the region is well-documented. On good terms with each other, the Shoshone and Bannock hunted from central Wyoming to eastern California, entering the Yellowstone region through the forks of the Snake River. The Tukudeka, who became known as the Sheep Eater Indians, lived in the mountainous regions of central and eastern Idaho and northwestern Wyoming. Once regarded as a distinct tribe, most anthropologists now consider them a band of the Shoshone. Other Shoshone bands also named themselves by what they ate: Salmon Eaters (Agaidika), Fish Eaters (Pengwidika), Dove Eaters (Haivodika), and Buffalo Eaters (Kucundika). Although some early writers depicted the Tukudeka as superstitious, poor, and even squalid, Richard Bartlett used Osborne Russell's trapper narrative as evidence that they lived well by aboriginal standards despite their lack of horses. They hunted bighorn sheep, deer,

elk, pronghorn, and bear, and their clothing, hides, and bows were in high demand among other Shoshone bands. The Tukudeka left Yellowstone when, under pressure from Superintendent Philetus Norris, the agent at Fort Washakie sent a party of Shoshone “to escort the Tukudeka to new homes on the Wind River Reservation” in 1879.

The Nez Perce, Flathead, Kalispel, Pend d’Oreille, and Coeur d’Alene were also known to travel to the Yellowstone region regularly. According to Yellow Wolf, one of Chief Joseph’s scouts in the Nez Perce War, they were familiar with the Yellowstone country and the “hot smoking springs and the high-shooting water were nothing new” to them. The Assiniboine have traditions of journeying from the plains of northeastern Montana as far as the geyser basins of Yellowstone. There is one mention of the Arapaho and a few that also place Lakota in the region.

Moses Harris, the park’s first acting superintendent during the period of army administration, tried to prevent Bannock hunting parties from entering the region during the 1880s, but they continued to hunt in areas around the park into the 1890s. In 1896, in the case of *Ward v. Race Horse*, the Supreme Court found that native hunting rights no longer existed in the region. By the end of the nineteenth century, native peoples were seldom seen in Yellowstone.

Origins of the Frightened Indians Story

THE EURO-AMERICAN BELIEF that Indians were frightened by Yellowstone’s geysers fit in with the stereotype of Indians as “savages” who were scared of natural phenomena such as lightning, thunder, volcanoes, or even spouting waters. The explorers and trappers who heard of Yellowstone’s wonders from Indians or entered the region with Indian guides generally did so without any appreciation for native religious beliefs; as was the accepted view among Euro-Americans at the time, Indians were regarded as pagans and heathens. According to George Horse Capture, deputy assistant director of the National Museum of the American Indian, mountain men wandered through the region “carrying few possessions, but a lot of cultural baggage.”

Therefore, it is necessary to question the primary sources on which historians rely. Euro-American chroniclers seldom named their sources or the tribal affiliations of the Indians mentioned, or indicated how they obtained their information. George Horse Capture told me that although trappers depicted Indians as wild and without rules, it was the trappers who often came West to live away from the rules of their society, while native tribes lived in complex cultures with well-developed, albeit unwritten, laws. Anthropologists have also demonstrated the ordered nature of American Indian life in numerous studies.

The first reference to the possibility that Indians feared the Yellowstone region appears in the expedition journals of William Clark. Under the heading, “Notes of information I believe correct,” Clark included information he received in 1808 from George Drouillard, another fur trader. It contains the following text:

[A]t the head of this river the Indians give an account that very frequently there is a loud nois [*sic*] heard like thunder which makes the earth tremble—they state that

they seldom go there because their children cannot sleep at night for this noise and conceive it possessed of spirits who are averse that men should be near them.

Although Drouillard's report indicates that these Indians avoided the area, he explained that they did so because of their belief that Yellowstone was home to spirits they did not wish to upset. He does not directly state that they were frightened by these spirits, but implies that they respected them.

Daniel Potts, Joe Meek, and Osborne Russell, who were among the first trappers to enter the Yellowstone area, all left written accounts of the thermal basins, and Russell stayed with a Tukudeka encampment, but none of them commented on native beliefs about Yellowstone. The most renowned trapper associated with Yellowstone, Jim Bridger, repeated the story that the geysers frightened the Indians, but he was notorious for embellishing his tales with artful fabrications of petrified forests containing petrified birds singing petrified songs and rivers that ran so fast the friction heated them. The Jesuit missionary, Pierre-Jean DeSmet, never visited the Yellowstone region, but he drew a map for the Fort Laramie Treaty Council with Bridger's help, and that may explain why he wrote, shortly after attending the treaty conference:

The hunters and Indians speak of it with a superstitious fear, and consider it the abode of evil spirits, that is to say, a kind of hell. Indians seldom approach it without offering some sacrifice, or at least without presenting the calumet of peace to the turbulent spirits, that they may be propitious. They declare that the subterranean noises proceed from the forging of warlike weapons: each eruption of earth is in their eyes, the result of a combat between the infernal spirits.

This anecdotal myth seems to derive more from the pagan Greeks than with American Indians. Although the Indians DeSmet was referring to had no indigenous knowledge of metallurgy or weapons forging, Bridger had once worked as an apprentice to a blacksmith in St. Louis, and would have heard such stories from other smiths. He received no other education, was reputed to have an excellent memory, and was said to be superstitious himself.

Subsequent exploring parties readily accepted the idea that Indians feared the geysers, but their sources were nameless mountain men. David Folsom, in the Folsom-Cook-Peterson exploring party of 1869, heard from trappers that Indians believed the region to be the abode of evil spirits. Nathaniel P. Langford, who helped organize the 1870 Washburn expedition, met Bridger in 1866 and believed some of his tales of spouting geysers might be true. He makes no note of talking with Indians, but later wrote in his expedition journal, "The Indians approach [the Yellowstone region] under the fear of a superstition originating in the volcanic forces surrounding it." Likewise, Lt. Gustavus Doane, who accompanied the Washburn expedition, doesn't mention his source, but noted in his journal that "[t]he larger tribes never enter this basin, restrained by superstitious ideas in connection with the thermal springs."

After Norris became park superintendent in 1877, he repeatedly referred to

the Indians' "superstitious awe of the hissing springs, sulphur basins, and spouting geysers" in his annual reports to the Secretary of the Interior. When the Nez Perce retreated through Yellowstone during the War of 1877, Norris believed they chose this route out of desperation and because they had "acquired sufficient civilization and Christianity to at least overpower their pagan superstitious fear of *earthly* fire-hole basins and brimstone pits." However, the Indians who fled from Oregon and Idaho under Chief Joseph, Little Bird, and Looking Glass were the most traditional Nez Perce bands in following native religious practices.

Harry Norton's 1873 guidebook on Yellowstone stated that "there exists among [Indians] an unconquerable superstition that the great Manitou here displays his anger towards his red children." Thirteen years later, in *Through the Yellowstone Park on Horseback*, George Wingate repeated Norris's description of the Indian fear of geysers almost verbatim. Hiram Chittenden, who wrote the first history of Yellowstone in 1895, found it strange that "no knowledge of that country seems to have been derived from the Indians." However, he believed that Indians avoided the region for practical reasons, because if they had superstitions about it, there would have been "well authenticated Indian traditions of so marvelous a country."



Frontispiece for the book entitled, The Story of Man in Yellowstone by Merrill D. Beal, published in 1949 by Caxton Printers, Ltd. Depicting an unknown fur trapper taken aback by an erupting geyser. His particular emotional reaction—fear? awe? surprise?—can't be known with certainty either.

Twentieth-Century Views of Indians in Yellowstone

AN ASSUMPTION THAT INDIANS WERE FRIGHTENED of Yellowstone had become prevalent by the 1930s. A 1929 book written by Superintendent Horace Albright with Frank Taylor suggested that Indians both feared the geysers and found the land to be inaccessible and of little utility. The most recent validation for the idea that the Indians feared the geysers appears in the work of Åke Hultkrantz, the Swedish historian who is largely responsible for its widespread acceptance among anthropologists. In a 1954 article in *Ethnos*, Hultkrantz maintained that the Indians' fear of going to Yellowstone was so strong it constituted a religious-emotional taboo that could be overcome only in times of distress. He regarded their reticence in providing information about the region as evidence of an Indian belief that even mentioning the names of the places

where geysers existed was dangerous. The *Ethnos* article later became a chapter in Hultkrantz's 1981 book, *Belief and Worship in Native North America*.

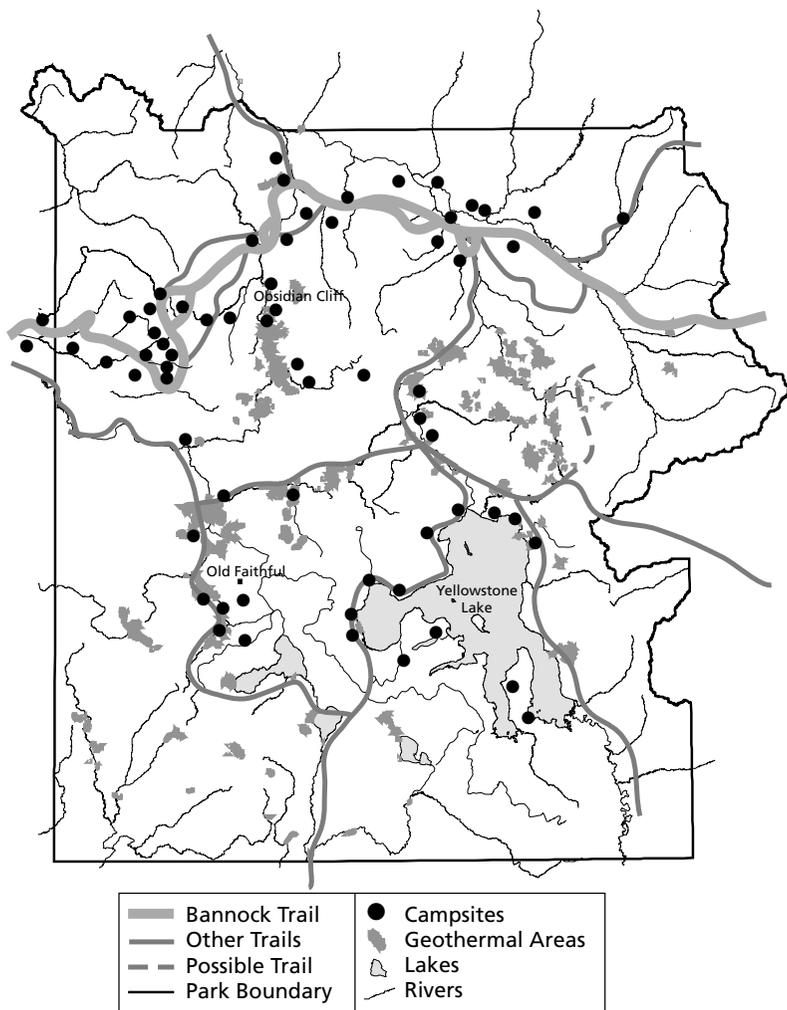
Hultkrantz based his research on sources which, by his own admission, are not rich, being mostly Shoshone. These sources include: (1) the accounts of early trappers and explorers, primarily DeSmet and Ferris; (2) official reports regarding the exploration and establishment of the park, particularly those of Lt. Doane, Superintendent Norris, and General Phillip Sheridan; (3) later non-official documents, including books on the "Sheepstealers" and a letter from the superintendent of Wind River Agency; and (4) notes from his fieldwork among Shoshone on the Wind River Reservation between 1948 and 1958.

While Indian fear of the Yellowstone region continued to be mentioned in guidebooks into the 1980s, some historians following Chittenden doubted this interpretation. Since the late 1940s archeologists have located lithic scatters, timbered lodges (or wickiups), and other debris indicating aboriginal campsites throughout Yellowstone, including thermal areas at the Norris, Midway, and Lower geyser basins. (In the early years of the park, many arrowheads and artifacts were removed or purchased by visitors as souvenirs.) Of the more than 400 former Indian campsites that have been located in the park, more than 40 are near areas of thermal activity. Archeologist Carling Malouf, who identified occupation sites around Mammoth, along the Firehole River, and behind the Old Faithful Inn, rejected the "Indian fear" hypothesis in 1958. Writing in 1974, historian Aubrey Haines believed that the Indians who possessed a fear of geysers were only those "whose contact with whites had developed a conception of an underworld."

Hultkrantz did revise his argument in 1979, taking into account archeological evidence that seemed to contradict his belief that the geysers were taboo to the Indians, but he maintained his original thesis while downplaying native fear of "the less dramatic hot springs." Though somewhat skeptical, anthropologist Joel Janetski repeated most of Hultkrantz's thesis in his 1987 book on the Indians of Yellowstone.

What the Indians Knew

CHITTENDEN AND HULTKRANTZ were among those who based their conclusions about Indians in Yellowstone on a perception that while the Indians gave geographical information to explorers, they did not mention Yellowstone's wonders. More recently, however, historians have found evidence of how Indians shared their knowledge with Euro-Americans that suggests otherwise. In 1805, the Governor of Louisiana Territory, James Wilkinson, learned about the Yellowstone headwaters and a "volcano" nearby from a map drawn on a buffalo hide by an unidentified Indian. Sometime after his return to St. Louis in 1806, Meriwether Lewis wrote that, according to Indian sources, the Yellowstone River had "a considerable fall...within the mountains but at what distance from it's source we never could learn." While reconnoitering the route for a road from Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton in 1863, Capt. John Mullan learned from Indians of the existence of "an infinite number of hot springs at the headwaters of the Missouri, Columbia, and Yellowstone rivers, and



Yellowstone map depicts Native American trails and campsites, and their proximities to the park's geothermal areas. Map courtesy J. Weixelman, geothermal data provided by Yellowstone's Spatial Analysis Center, and digital treatment by Tami Blackford.

that hot geysers, similar to those in California, existed at the head of the Yellowstone.” George Harvey Bacon, a Montana prospector, went to the Upper Geyser Basin with “a friendly band of Indians” in 1865. That same year, Father Francis Kuppens visited the sights of Yellowstone, including its geysers, in the company of Blackfeet.

Hultkrantz claimed that Indians avoided the thermal basins and few Indian trails went there, but despite its relatively severe climate and demanding topography, the Yellowstone region actually had more trails than other parts of Wyoming. Like Indian trails elsewhere, they followed the river valleys and therefore came close to the geysers

and hot springs at West Thumb, Mud Volcano, and in the Firehole Valley. Many of these English names associated with Yellowstone today are not exactly enticing, yet Hultkrantz regarded Indian names for Yellowstone as evidence of their fear, stating that such names were “soberly descriptive” and did not reveal their emotional attitude toward the region.

The Shoshone referred to the Yellowstone region as the place where “Water-keeps-on-coming-out.” According to legend, the Blackfeet name for the area, “Many Smokes,” comes from the fact that when they first saw the steam from the geysers, they thought it was smoke from an enemy camp. Other recorded Indian names for Yellowstone include “Burning Mountain” and “Summit of the World.” But these names for the Yellowstone region are not noticeably different from those used by American Indians elsewhere. The Wyandot name for the Missouri River translates as “muddy water” and their name for the Kansas City, Missouri, site translates as “the point where rock projects into the Muddy Water.” The Cheyenne called the Smoky Hill the “Bunch of Trees River” and the Solomon River, “Turkey Creek.” Closer to Yellowstone, the Crow called the Stillwater River, “Buffalo Jumps Over the Bank River” and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone, “Rotten Sun Dance Lodge River.” The National Park Service uses Blackfeet names for places within Glacier National Park including “Chief Mountain” and “Two Medicine Lake.”

The Bannock Trail

HEAVY SNOWFALL KEPT THE YELLOWSTONE AREA inaccessible much of the year, game was more plentiful at lower elevations, and the mountains made travel difficult. Yet in the 1840s, after the buffalo were exterminated from the Snake River plains, the Bannock developed an old trail adjacent to hot springs at Mammoth and near the Yellowstone River crossing into a major thoroughfare to reach the buffalo ranges of Montana and Wyoming. By crossing over the mountains perpendicular to the river valleys, the trail avoided war parties of Blackfeet and Lakota on the plains, providing greater safety than other routes to the Bighorn Basin and Powder River country. Scouting and hunting parties could access the plains and the valleys to check on the position of both the buffalo and their enemies while the rest of the tribe stayed secure in the mountains. Estimated by Haines to be 200 miles long, it came to be known as the Bannock Trail, but it was also used by the Northern Shoshone, Nez Perce, Kootenai, Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Crow, and is still visible in places today. The fact that tribes used the Bannock Trail to avoid contact with enemies would suggest that the Yellowstone region was to be feared less than their enemies.

Wayne Replogle, a Yellowstone naturalist who explored the Bannock Trail more than anyone else in the twentieth century, referred to it as a “great aboriginal highway.” He saw the frequent splitting and rejoining of alternative trail routes as evidence that the trail was used by a variety of groups of people for a variety of reasons under varying weather conditions. The Euro-American explorers who entered Yellowstone always used Indian trails. Both the Folsom and Washburn parties used the Bannock Trail. As described by Lt. Doane:



Joseph Weixelman on the Bannock Trail in 1998. The trail is still visible in places today. Photo courtesy J. Weixelman.

Passing over this high rolling prairie for several miles, we struck at length a heavy Indian trail leading up the river, and finding a small colt abandoned on the range, we knew that they [a party of Crow Indians] were but a short distance ahead of us... Descending from the plateau through a steep ravine into the valley, and skirting for a distance of two miles a swampy flat, we came to the first warm spring found on the route....

What the Indians Say

ELDERS FROM SEVERAL TRIBES have preserved the history and traditions of their people concerning the Yellowstone region. Because more than a hundred years have passed since these tribes were forced to move to lands far from Yellowstone, there are discontinuities in the record. The army had to order some tribes, like the Bannock, to stay out of Yellowstone, creating an enmity that has persisted. I found that my efforts to obtain oral histories were hampered by previous research conducted by anthropologists and historians who did not respect tribal customs and did not receive approval from the elders for what they wrote. As a result, many tribal cultural committees were no longer willing to cooperate with researchers.

Although the accuracy of oral histories may be questioned, especially when three generations separate the sources from the attitudes under investigation, there are good reasons to give them as much credence as has been accorded the reports of early nineteenth century fur trappers. First, the information collected pertains to overall attitudes and values surrounding Yellowstone rather than specific dates or places. One

is likely to remember the impressions one's grandparents leave more accurately than specific events. Second, these tribal elders are familiar with the culture in question and with using oral traditions. In some cases, they could infer attitudes from their knowledge of what their ancestors believed. For example, Oliver Archdale could explain that if the Assiniboine had feared Yellowstone, they would have gone there to test themselves, given his understanding of the culture of which he is a part. Although it is possible that their closeness to their culture might make them want to present it in the most flattering way, the same is equally true when using accounts written by non-Indians.

Finally, information gathered through an oral history may be considered particularly reliable when it is corroborated by another, independently given interview. For example, George Kicking Woman, a respected elder and religious leader of the Blackfeet nation, reported in 1992 that the Yellowstone region was sacred to the Shoshones without knowing that Haman Wise, who was a descendant of both the Wind River Shoshone and the Bannock, had made the same point in 1991. The fact that the Shoshone and Blackfeet are traditional enemies and Kicking Woman had nothing to gain by his statement added to the credibility of Wise's claim.

What we can learn from these oral histories is that different tribes used Yellowstone in different ways. Like Hultkrantz's sources, Wise spoke of both the sacred nature of the geyser basins for the Shoshone and Bannock, and the practical use of the hot springs for bathing. However, unlike Hultkrantz, Wise claimed that the park's thermal wonders did not frighten the Shoshone or the Bannock. "The Indians wasn't scared of it. This was a valuable place for them. This was more of a spiritual [place]. It was something cherished by them..." Wise understood the connotation that "fear" has for Euro-Americans and felt certain that such fear was not a part of his people's response to the region. Yet, stressing the sacred nature of the region, he insinuated that there were practices that had to be followed to demonstrate the proper respect. Without such practices, one would be in danger of showing disrespect and paying the consequences.

The Indian use of hot springs for bathing and their construction of tubs to hold the water has been documented elsewhere in the West. According to geologist George Marler, Indians were responsible for diverting Tangled Creek to create a reservoir at Tank Spring (also called Ranger Pool or Old Bath Lake) in the Lower Geyser Basin. In 1973 he reported that "the degree of mineral deposition [and] the fact that the pond was used for bathing in the 1880s, strongly suggests that it had its origin prior to 1870." Although other archeologists have disputed his claim, Marler considered this basin, which has a diameter of 60 feet, one of Yellowstone's "most important archeological sites."

One of Hultkrantz's sources told the story of Nakok, a Shoshone who went to Yellowstone to hunt; when "they arrived at the steaming waters...undressed and bathed, and came back clean." Wise, who was appointed by the Wind River Reservation Tribal Council "to represent the Eastern Shoshone Tribe concerning all Traditional, Cultur[al], Spiritual, Ceremonial & Sacred sites, etc," explained, "This is a natural Jacuzzi for us...It's healthy....There is a lot of value to these springs." He mentioned that the Shoshone and Bannock used mud from the mudpots to



Max Big Man and his daughter, Myrtle, of the Crow Tribe, in front of Giant Geyser, 1933. In the 1920s and '30s, Max made presentations to park visitors about how the Crow lived "in the old days." NPS photo.

clean and purify the skin much as mud packs are used in health resorts today. The Shoshone at Coso Hot Springs in California were also known to use hot mud for baths. Chief White Hawk, who had fled with Chief Joseph across the park in 1877, told park naturalist William Kearns in 1935 that the Nez Perce were not scared of the geysers. According to Kearns, White Hawk “implied that the Indians used them for cooking.” Stories among the Crow suggest that they did the same, and might have drunk geyser water to promote good health.

Some tribes may have gathered pigments for paints from the minerals in the thermal areas. One Yellowstone guide remembered the Indians of the region “got most of their colors from the Mammoth Paint Pots.” Walter McClintock, who wrote extensively on the Blackfeet, recorded that they obtained pigment for yellow paint from “a place on the Yellowstone River near some warm springs.” The Shoshone soaked the horns of bighorn sheep in the hot water until they were malleable enough to be shaped. This was perhaps the technique used by the Tukudeka to make horn bows. James Beckwourth related that the Crow used the hot springs in a similar way to straighten buffalo and elk horns.

Yellowstone as Sacred Land

MANY TRIBES REGARDED THE LANDS that became Yellowstone National Park as sacred. A Nez Perce historian, Adeline Fredin, recalled her grandparents telling about a long trip to Yellowstone to pray, bathe, and sweat. According to Fredin’s letter, “it was one place where the Great Spirit existed and we could bathe the body and spirit directly.” She said that the “geysers/hot springs sites were a ceremonial and religious part in our history” and the Nez Perce went to Yellowstone to purify their bodies and souls.

One of Hultkrantz's sources told him that "the Indians prayed to the geysers because there were spirits inside them." Another said that his grandfather, Tavonasia, and his band "raised their tents close to the Firehole Geyser Basin...The men themselves bathed in the geysers whilst they directed their prayers to the spirits." They approached the geysers, hot springs, and thermal features with an attitude of reverence and prayed to the spirits present for assistance on vision quests.

According to ethnographic accounts, a vision quest is a special rite for many tribes in which the Indians go alone to the wilderness to pray and fast, asking assistance from the Spirit World. They believe that if the petitioner is sincere and respectful, the Spirit World may bestow a vision or dream carrying the power of the spirit benefactor. Referred to as one's "medicine," this may include the power to heal or to foresee future events, or strength in war. Like Hultkrantz's sources, Wise identified Yellowstone as an area the Shoshone and Bannock used for vision questing; he said that Yellowstone's thermal basins contained especially powerful spirits in Shoshone cosmology. These spirits were revered, and one would be careful not to insult them. They were powerful, but also potentially helpful. Deference and respect were important.

For example, even when just passing through the region, the Shoshone and Bannock offered their pipes in prayer, and they left gifts when petitioning or thanking the spirit world. Wise explained that these gifts were objects of value such as tobacco that was left on the ground or smoked. This information clarifies the passage in DeSmet's letter that refers to "the calumet of peace to the turbulent spirits" presented by the Indians. Arrowheads were left beside or in a hot spring, Wise noted, "to receive the value of this spring." This is a possible explanation for an arrowhead that Marler found while cleaning a hot spring in the Firehole Geyser Basin in 1959. (The spring is now known as Arrowhead Spring.)



Unidentified Native American family at the Upper Geyser Basin, circa 1930. NPS photo.

The Blackfeet did not come to Yellowstone to vision quest or fast because they preferred the region surrounding Glacier National Park and the Two Medicine wilderness. However, George Kicking Woman maintained that “the Blackfeet don’t bother things like that, if they think they’re sacred to them people, they won’t bother them.” Knowing it was sacred to others, the Blackfeet respected Yellowstone, and when traveling through the region, they stopped to offer their pipes in prayer or leave tobacco. Kicking Woman noted that prayers were especially said for a safe journey on the dangerous trip.

Chief Plenty-Coups of the Crow told of a medicine man, The Fringe, who received his power from a hot spring. Located in the Bighorn Basin, this was probably the large spring at Thermopolis. On the third day of a vision quest, The Fringe disappeared on an island in the spring; later he related that his spirit guide took him to his home below where he received instruction. After that, when the Crow passed this spring, they dropped in beads or something pretty for “the dream father” of The Fringe, and they may have approached Yellowstone in a similar spirit in the nineteenth century. During his ethnographic overview of Yellowstone National Park, Peter Nabokov uncovered evidence that The Fringe also came to Yellowstone to fast.

More distant tribes shared the perception of Yellowstone as a sacred place. Stories that place the Assiniboine in the Yellowstone region also mention prayer and the offering of the pipe. According to legend, Walking Bull, a noted Assiniboine chief, was mystified by the geysers when he came upon them during a personal trek. In a 1991 interview, Otto Cantrell, also known as Chief Bluebird, said that he believed Walking Bull would have sought the geysers’ meaning with prayer, because the Assiniboine believe all things to have meaning, but only the Creator can reveal it.

There are stories relating how native peoples set aside their animosities around hot springs in Apache and Ute territory, as well as in Yellowstone. Although this practice may have been more honored in the breach, the belief that intertribal warfare was not supposed to be brought to regions containing hot springs supports the idea that Yellowstone was sacred land to Native Americans. Fredin asserted that at Yellowstone hostilities were left outside the area. Wise spoke of Yellowstone as a neutral ground and contended that as they came for purposes other than warfare, tribes never fought each other here. The Haynes 1890 guidebook mentions the legend that Obsidian Cliff was neutral ground to all Rocky Mountain Indians. Although Native Americans and trappers did fight in the park, only one account exists of a battle between tribes. It is supposed to have taken place on Three Rivers Peak, away from the geyser basins, and the account cannot be verified.

In Mircea Eliade’s book, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, the French historian of religions observed that “for religious man, nature is never only ‘natural’: it is always fraught with a religious value... it spontaneously reveals the many aspects of the sacred.” According to Kevin Locke, a Lakota Baha’i well-versed in the oral traditions of his people, “the pre-eminence of the Yellowstone basin as a site of particular spiritual potency invoking awe, wonderment and spiritual upliftment for thousands of years is indisputable.” Although his claim might trouble historians demanding documentation in the European tradition, knowing the ways of his people, Locke could see no other explanation. And this sense of awe and inspiration

has also been found among Euro-Americans who have visited Yellowstone. Thomas Moran, the landscape painter who accompanied the Hayden expedition, captured this wonderment in paintings and sketches that many find inspiring today.

Keeping these insights in mind, the reaction of the Pend d'Oreille to the geysers in 1834 reported by Warren Ferris may be interpreted as a spiritual response, not fear. When he arrived there with the Indians, Ferris was reckless in his enthusiasm to explore, given the dangers posed by the thin crust covering the geyser basins. Thus, historians should construe the attitude of the Pend d'Oreille as wisdom and reverence. Ferris did not say that they were afraid of the geysers, but that they found his actions "appalling." Because geysers and hot springs were sacred, they may have considered Ferris's wantonly approaching them offensive. Many see Ferris's account, according to which one of the Indians "remarked that hell, of which he had heard from the whites, must be in the vicinity," as evidence that Indians believed geysers were the abode of evil spirits. A careful reading of his quote, however, reveals that this was not a native belief. It shows that the Pend d'Oreille had learned the term "hell" from Euro-Americans and applied it here as a way to communicate their thoughts to a non-Indian.

What emerges concerning Indian attitudes toward Yellowstone's geysers is a complex world view. What is clear is that the thermal wonders of Yellowstone did not terrify all, or even most, American Indians. At least some, and perhaps many, American Indians revered the region and treated it as they did other sacred lands. Euro-Americans originated the idea that Indians "feared" Yellowstone and it must be dispelled to understand the true nature of Yellowstone's Indian past. First and foremost, many Native Americans treated Yellowstone as a special region, a sacred land. They approached the geysers with reverence and respect, but this did not preclude them from using the hot waters for utilitarian purposes. They came to pray and to seek inspiration to guide them through life. As an area of profound mystery and inspiration, Yellowstone was a special place to its first visitors—as it is to thousands of visitors today.

Bibliographic Essay—For Further Reading

THE SOURCES CONSULTED for this study were numerous. Unfortunately, space constraints did not allow for comprehensive footnotes. The following sources were consulted in general and the editors of *Yellowstone Science* can be contacted for the citation to any specific reference.

Of course, any study of Yellowstone's history must begin with Aubrey L. Haines' classic two volume history entitled *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park* (Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, 1977). His earlier study, *Yellowstone National Park, Its Exploration and Establishment* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 1974), was also extremely useful. A historiography of Yellowstone history must include Hiram Martin Chittenden's *The Yellowstone National Park*, edited by Richard A. Bartlett (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1964) and other histories consulted included Eugene Sayre Topping, *The Chronicles of the Yellowstone: An Accurate, Comprehensive History* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1888), James M. Hamilton, *History of Yellowstone National Park* (Previous to 1895) (Yellowstone Park: Typed by Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, c. 1933), William Turrentine Jackson, *The Early Exploration and Founding of*

Yellowstone National Park (Austin: University of Texas, June 1940), and Merrill D. Beal, *The Story of Man in Yellowstone* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1949). Most of these historians repeated the assertion that Indians feared Yellowstone's thermal wonders, but the more recent ones, including Aubrey Haines, questioned its accuracy.

The interpretation that Indians feared the geysers was championed by Åke Hultkrantz in "The Indians and the Wonders of Yellowstone: A Study of the Interrelations of Religion, Nature and Culture" *Ethnos* 1 (1954). This article later became a chapter in *Belief and Worship in Native North America*, edited by Christopher Vecsey (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981). He divided the Indians who utilized the resources of the Yellowstone region into three major cultural types and this analysis can be found in "The Indians in Yellowstone Park," *Annals of Wyoming* 29: 3 (Oct. 1957). Hultkrantz based his research on sources which, by his own admission, are not rich or diverse, coming mostly from the Shoshone. His analysis of the sources appears in "The Fear of Geysers Among Indians of the Yellowstone Park Area," in *Lifeways of Intermountain and Plains Montana Indians*, edited by Leslie B. Davis, (Bozeman: Montana State University, 1979).

Other writers who have written on Indians in Yellowstone include Joel C. Janetski, with his popular book *Indians of Yellowstone Park* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987) and the comprehensive report by Peter Nabokov and Larry Loendorf. This last study took four years to complete and this article's author assisted them where he could. The study took place in the mid-1990s and their report will go a long way in correcting what is known about the use of Yellowstone National Park by native peoples. Their results were reported by Nabokov in "Reintroducing the Indian: Observations of a Yellowstone Amateur," *The Aubrey L. Haines Lecture* at the Fourth Biennial Conference on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, *People and Place: The Human Experience in Greater Yellowstone*, Mammoth Hot Springs, on Oct. 13, 1997. In addition, the draft of their report, *American Indians and Yellowstone National Park: A Documentary Overview*, has been accepted for publication by the University of Oklahoma Press.

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The Folsom-Cook Exploration of the Upper Yellowstone in the Year 1869 (St. Paul: n.p., 1894), Nathaniel Pitt Langford, *The Discovery of Yellowstone Park: Journal of the Washburn Expedition to the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers in the Year 1870* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), Lt. Gustavus Cheyney Doane, "Official Report of the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition into the Upper Yellowstone in 1870," (Collection 492, Burlingame Special Collections, Renne Library, Montana State University, Bozeman), and Ferdinand V. Hayden, "The Hot Springs and Geysers of the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers." *The American Journal of Science and Arts* (February 1872).

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And most importantly, oral histories were collected from the Shoshone, the Blackfeet, and the Assiniboine between September 1991 and January 1992. Copies of these oral histories have been deposited with the Yellowstone Research Library in Mammoth. Other tribal cultural preservation officers, historians, and archivists assisted me through letters and phone interviews. Copies of these letters and notes have also been donated to the Yellowstone Research Library.

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